Bodies of Water (and the other kind of bodies)
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Bodies of Water (and the other kind of bodies)

by lady emebalia (emebalia)

Summary

Peter meets Stiles when he tries to dump a body at Stiles' lake (well, technically it's Derek's lake but semantics)

Notes

In Germany, we don't wish somebody Happy Birthday before the actual birthday. It's something you just don't do.
However, Lilykep's birthday is later this month, they want a story for their birthday and they are impatient and greedy and don't want to wait.
So, Happy Birthday Lilykep, this story is for you. And just remember, you brought this onto yourself, don't blame me if the universe kicks your ass for this.

Chapter 1

Peter was not having a good day. Well, not a good night since it was past three in the morning by now. It wasn't the fact that he was covered in blood or that he was carrying a body through the woods, things like that happened, it was the fact that he was hiding in the bushes like a damn teenager while the deputy in the patrol car was shining his flashlight into the very bushes Peter was currently hiding under.

Cursing under his breath Peter ducked deeper into the shadows. Even with the flashlight, the deputy shouldn't be able to spot him but it would just be his luck.

Eventually, the man decided that it had been nothing and turned off the flashlight.

Only when the back-lights had disappeared down the road, Peter dared to breath easier.

"That's all your fault," he told the dead omega at his side who didn't bother to answer. "Why couldn't you just take the hint and leave?"

This was Hale territory, had been for centuries, everybody knew that but it was also known that the Hale pack didn't mind other werewolves passing through and even offered shelter to the ones who respected the etiquette and introduced themselves properly to the alpha and stated their business in their territory.

Peter was the one who took care of the rest.

Most just needed a bit of encouragement to remember that they had something important to do on the other side of the country. Some just couldn't take a hint. Which lead to situations like this. Usually, Peter was better prepared, he had to admit.

He had thought that he could just scare off the scrawny guy before he could pile his shit on their doorstep. As far as Peter knew the guy was not part of a pack but he'd managed to piss off a few packs and even hunters and now a lot of not so nice people were looking all over for him.

Peter didn't care as long as he wasn't bringing a war into his territory but that idiot had been determined to piss off another pack which just happened to be the Hale pack. Mainly by trying to kill Peter.

"Not your best of plans, wasn't it?" Peter looked down on the body still half-hidden under the bush. It was tempting to just leave him here but he would be found too soon, causing even more trouble.

Since Stilinski had been elected sheriff, he had his deputies patrol this back road frequently. They were looking for dumb teenagers sneaking out to the lake for some nightly skinny dipping, which in this lake was more of a dare than something even the dumbest kid did for fun, but they wouldn't miss a dead body right next to the road for long.

With a sigh, Peter picked up the dead guy again and started walking. He wasn't familiar with the woods on this side of the town so he had stuck close to the road because getting lost just a few miles out of Beacon Hills would have been the cherry on top of this pile of crap. He would never live that down.

Instead, he had almost gotten caught by a pimpled deputy who was green enough to get stuck with patrolling the back-roads at three in the morning. He would have never lived that down either.

"Pack doesn't go there," he muttered under his breath and tried to get a good grip on the body over his shoulder.

The preserve with the Hale house was on the other side of town and Peter knew the woods around there like the back of his hand. But this part of the woods didn't belong to the Hale pack and Hales didn't go there. Period.

Naturally, Peter had been one of the dumb teenagers sneaking out here to see what all the fuss was about but there were just more woods out here. And the lake of course. At least Peter hadn't been dumb enough to take a swim in there. The lake was known for its wicked undercurrent, people tend to drown if they dared to go for a swim. Some did it on purpose, though. Aside from being a magnet for teenagers looking for an adrenaline kick, it was also known as a suicide spot.

Sheriff Stilinski's patrolling routine had scared off most of the idiots, though, Peter had to give him that.

Keeping an ear out for any cars Peter walked alongside the road until he reached the overgrown path that would take him to the lake. In the dark, he couldn't read the signs but the *No Trespassing* was clear.

The body wouldn't pass as a drowny, he looked more like he had a run-in with … well, a pissed-off werewolf, but Peter hoped that it would stay undetected long enough for nature to take its course. At least the water should wash off any trace Peter had left on it.

But chances were good that nobody would find the body for years. Aside from the stray teenager here and there, and the Sheriff was doing a good job on that side, nobody ever came out here. The area was even partly fenced in to keep trespassers out.

Thinking about it, Peter didn't even know who this parts of the woods belonged to. They were privately owned, that much he knew but not by who.

"Strange." Peter adjusted his grip on the body over his shoulder. At least the bleeding had stopped and the guy wasn't dripping down on his ass any longer.

However, it was Peter's job to know what was going on in and around Beacon Hills and he took pride in knowing that little got past him but he had never really thought about this part of the woods. Which was strange because it was just on the other side of town.

"Because it's just miles of trees with a lake in the middle," Peter justified his lack of knowledge to himself. He probably should look into this, it didn't sit right with him, not knowing who a huge chunk of the land around here belonged to, but it was probably not a good idea to show interest in the lake right after he'd dumped a body there.

"And pack doesn't go there." He could almost hear his grandmother's voice. She was the first he could remember telling him this but she hadn't been the only one by far. Every adult in the pack was telling the kids the same thing. That they could roam the woods on their side of the town as much as they wanted but pack didn't go to the other side. Talia was telling her kids this and Peter himself might have said it on occasion. Peter was pretty sure that Laura and Cora had sneaked out here just to have a look but there wasn't anything to see.

Besides, walking deeper into the woods here felt strange. If asked, Peter would have said that Beacon Hills and the surrounding woods were all Hale territory but this part didn't feel like territory at all. It almost felt as if he wasn't welcomed here. As if he was the intruder somebody needed to scare off.

The feeling grew stronger with every step and when he finally stepped out of the woods with the lake lying in front of him, the surface eerily calm and uninterrupted, Peter was almost ready to just drop the body and run.

"Get a grip," Peter muttered to himself. He did drop the body but only to have his hands free. If he got attacked out here, he wanted to be able to defend himself.

The path ended at a pier but it looked old and rotten and Peter wasn't sure if he should dare to step out on it. An involuntary bath in the lake sounded just like the perfect way to end this night.

There was no boat at the pier but Peter hadn't expected to find a convenient boat waiting for him out here. As if he had planned any part of this night. His plan had been to chase that idiot off, get home and maybe read for a while while the house around him settled down for the night.

He liked these quiet evenings where he sat in his chair in the living room, reading. Right after dinner the house was still loud and chaotic but farther into the evening it became quieter. The youngest went to bed first, the conversations became low murmurs and eventually, it would be just Talia and him. They had the best conversations right around midnight.

Talia would pat his shoulder, remind him to not stay up too long and then she would turn in as well, leaving Peter the only one still awake.

Peter would go to bed eventually but before that, he usually stepped outside for a moment to get a feeling for the night, a reassurance that they were safe, before he came back in and locked the doors.

But not tonight.

Peter glared at the body at his feet again.

"You're a pain in my ass, you know that?"

At least the feeling of not being welcomed had eased off, or he had gotten used to it, either way, it was time to get rid of the body and go home. He should probably get rid of his clothes as well and take a shower before the pack woke up. It wasn't a secret that he was the one, taking care of any threats to the pack, but there was no need for the others to see him soaked in blood.

Maybe he should wash up in the lake while he was here, just to take care of the worst.

"But first I have to get rid of you." He kicked the body in the side, just because.

Aside from the pier, there was a small cabin to the left but it was too far away for Peter to tell if it was in any better condition than the pier. As far as he knew, nobody came out here for longer periods of time, so it had probably been abandoned for decades.

Which would make it a good hiding spot for a body. And he would be able to dump it there without taking a swim which was a plus. The first this night.

There was a small path, following the curve of the lake, but Peter couldn't tell if it was man-made or if animals had made it when they came here to drink.

Taking a sniff, Peter didn't catch a trace of people, but he had a stinking, blood-soaked body draped over his shoulder so he wouldn't read too much into that assessment.

There was no heart-beat coming from the cabin, that much he could tell when he came closer.

The cabin itself was old but not in a bad shape. As far as Peter could tell in the poor light, the roof was intact, the door was closed and hanging properly in its hinges. The shutters were closed as well but there was no light behind them.

Judging by the size, it was only a small, one-room cabin, most likely used as a shelter over a fishing trip. Peter doubted it had electricity or running water.

When it had been used last, Peter couldn't tell, it might have been years. Perfect.

The locked door was no problem for Peter. He ripped it half off its hinges without a second thought.

The inside of the cabin was just like expected. A place to sleep in one corner, a stove with some firewood piled next to it in the other. A few shelves and cupboards.

What he hadn't expected where books and magazines piled along one wall, a stack of DVDs and the black rectangle thing on the bed turned out to be a laptop. Why somebody would forget something like this here and didn't come back for it was beyond Peter but why somebody would bring a laptop to a fishing trip in the first place was another mystery.

Peter took a breath, maybe the cabin wasn't as abandoned as it looked, but the copper scent of blood was still clogging his nose. However, he was pretty sure that nobody had been here for quite a while.

Peter stepped out of the cabin. Time to finish up. If he left the body on the bed and the door open, chances were good that animals would take care of his problem. By the time the body would be found it should look as if a homeless guy had broken into the cabin, died in his sleep and got snacked on by some critters.

Grinning to himself, Peter picked up the body again.

"What are you doing here?"

Peter swirled around just in time for the condescending "Huh?" which the person standing in the water delivered with his whole body and loud splashing.

"This is private property."

Chapter 2

For a second Peter just looked at the person standing in the shallow water, dumbfounded. He had not heard said person sneaking up on him and he had been on high alert. Now, however, the heart-beat just a few feet away was loud in his ears along with the other noises the person was making in the water, how could he have missed that? Okay, he had been focused on the land and the woods surrounding the cabin but he should have heard if somebody was in the water right behind him.

"Well?" The person asked and stepped closer. A teenager, Peter noticed with some delay. His wet hair was plastered to his skull and water was running down his naked torso, as if he'd just came up to the surface. Which would explain why Peter hadn't heard him. Hearing a heart-beat from underwater was not impossible but it was hard to pick up without actually looking for it. The boy must have a long breath, though, because for sure Peter would have noticed if he'd dived in anywhere nearby.

"What are you doing here?" Peter asked. "Swimming is forbidden here."

The boy came out of the water and at least he was wearing wet shorts if nothing else.

"So is trespassing, breaking and entering." He gestured at the cabin behind Peter but then his eyes fell on the dead body at Peter's feet. "And littering." And then, as some kind of afterthought: "And murder. I guess. Dude, did you kill that guy?"

Peter quirked an eyebrow at him, not sure how to handle this. Usually, people started screaming or running when they saw somebody covered in blood with a body right next to them. Most started pleading that Peter didn't kill them as well and of course nobody would tell anything to anybody ever. But not this kid. He was coming closer, a curious eye on the dead person.

"I'm friends with the sheriff, you know." He was now standing on dry land, water running down his legs. He had long limbs, pale skin, and moles all over his body. Not the build of a fighter but lean and not to be underestimated in a fight, that much Peter could tell.

"So I better not kill you?" Peter guessed. He doubted that the kid even knew the sheriff. He wouldn't be out here in the middle of the night if he did. The sheriff was the one person who took the *no going out to the lake* this seriously. Or maybe it was because of that. If the kid was friends with the sheriff, he probably thought that he wouldn't get in much trouble if he got caught out here.

"What?" The kid had been inspecting the body, totally dismissing Peter which just wasn't right.

"I'm covered in blood, that guy is dead," Peter stated the facts. Maybe the kid was a bit slow and not aware of the danger he was in. "You are a witness."

"I didn't see you kill him," he pointed out and crouched down next to the body to get a better look. Peter wasn't sure how much he was even able to see because aside from the poor light from the stars and the thin sickle of the moon, it was pretty dark. Not much of a problem for Peter but for human eyes it must be pitch black.

"You did a number on him." The kid nodded in what could have been approval. "But you're not going to leave your trash in my cabin."

"What makes you think that I'm not going to leave you right next to him?" Peter threatened. The kid was weird and he was getting on his nerves. Peter could be half-way home by now but no, he had to deal with a nosy teenager. Killing him would be the easy solution and he might have no

other choice to keep him from talking but it didn't sit right with him. The kid was most likely out here on a dumb dare and it didn't seem right to just kill him for a stupid wrong place wrong time thing.

"You could try." The kid threw him a look over his shoulder, not in the slightest bothered that he was still crouching with his bare back at Peter. It would be so easy. But something in that look told Peter that it wouldn't be easy at all. He rubbed his face with one hand, this night had been way too long already.

"What do you want?" If money could solve this problem, he would take it.

"I want your wolfy ass back on your side of the town." The kid stood up and looked him straight in the eye. "And take this with you." He stubbed the body with his bare toe to make his point.

"Wolfy?" Peter tried to hide his surprise behind an amused expression. He wasn't sure if he succeeded. This night was just getting better and better. If this kid knew about werewolves ...

"You're a member of the Hale pack, aren't you?" The kid asked. "Man, you sliced up this dude real good." He made a slashing motion with his hand, imitating claws, but then something seemed to occur to him. "Or is this a member of the Hale pack and you killed him?" He looked between Peter and the body. "Because that would be awesome, I'm telling you, but you're not going to dump a Hale on my doorstep, no way. Noho." He shook his head so vehemently that Peter feared he would give himself a concussion. "If this is a Hale, you're going to bring him right back where you found him. No Hales on this side of town and for sure I don't want the whole pack poking around to find the murderer of one of their members. No way."

"Nobody is going to come looking for him," Peter interrupted the flow of words, his mind racing. Whoever this boy was, he knew about werewolves, about the Hale pack, and he was most likely an enemy. And Peter had no idea who he even was. Interesting.

"There better won't be," the kid said darkly.

Peter didn't tell him about the other packs and the hunters the omega had pissed off who were most likely still looking for him but with any luck, they would just assume that he had long left the Hale territory.

Instead, Peter had a closer look at the kid. His first impression had been that he was just a human teenager but now he wasn't so sure any longer. He had sneaked up on him after all.

Peter took him in with all his senses but whatever he was, he couldn't place it. His heart was beating steadily in his chest, a bit fast but that was normal given the circumstances, he smelled of the lake water that was still pooling around his feet but under that, there was a very human scent. Like most teenagers, he could use a shower but that didn't help to place him. There was nothing indicating that he was anything but a teenager taking a swim in the lake in the middle of the night. He wasn't the first and for sure he wouldn't be the last, teenagers loved their dares no matter if the sheriff was patrolling the road or not.

"So you're the Hale." The boy put together the pieces.

"Maybe?" Peter felt an amused smile tucking at his lips. This kid was a mystery, he liked that.

"You're not welcomed here." The kid walked past him until he was almost up to his knees in the water. "Leave and take your trash elsewhere or I will tell the sheriff about you."

Peter shot forward and grabbed his wrist, claws digging into the soft skin.

"Why should I risk that?" He growled and let the blue bleed into his eyes.

The kid looked him straight in the eye, not in the slightest intimidated by the werewolf looming over him.

"If I disappear the sheriff will notice. And he will move heaven and hell to find me." His gaze darkened and he stepped closer until he was face to face with Peter. "But he's not the one you should worry about."

Something in the way he was saying it, made Peter shiver. He wasn't intimidated easily but he knew without a doubt that the kid was serious. Peter wasn't even entirely sure if he was human, he might not be that easy to kill.

"My apologies." Peter let go of his wrist and stepped back. "I'll leave."

He watched the kid for a moment longer who just stood there in the water but then Peter picked up the body and left. Putting his back on the kid felt wrong and Peter felt the tension between his shoulder blades but he kept walking.

He did dump the body miles out of Beacon Hills and he only made it back home around noon. But by then he'd made sure that nobody would find the body anytime soon, had washed off most of the blood in a creak and even managed to sneak into the house without anybody seeing him in his soiled clothes. A shower and a set of fresh clothes later Peter felt better but his mind was still racing. He hadn't slept all night but he was too wired for a nap.

Whoever the kid was, he knew about werewolves in general and the Hale pack in particular and for sure he wasn't friendly, facts Peter couldn't just ignore.

"Long night?" Talia joined him in the kitchen where he was downing his second coffee.

Peter gave her a look over the rim of his cup.

"Are we going to have problems?" She asked, fixing herself a cup. At this time of the day, the house was quiet. The kids were at school and most of the adults were at work. It was only him and Talia right now. Which was the reason he had been able to come in without anybody freaking out over the blood.

"The omega won't be a problem any longer," Peter answered truthfully.

"And what is going to be a problem?"

Peter threw her another glance, his sister knew him way too well.

"Not sure yet. I'll have to look into a few things," he said to which Talia nodded without more questions. She was the alpha, she had to know what was going on but she didn't need to know every little detail. If there was something to report, Peter would tell her but he knew she trusted him to take care of most things without bothering her. There were things she didn't need to know.

"The other side of town, you know the woods and the lake out there, who does that belong to?" He would have to look into that kid but the lake was also bothering him. The kid had drawn the same line, the Hale pack belonged on this side and not on the other. So, who did belong there? That was the big question.

"Why?" Talia asked but before he could even answer she added: "We don't go there."

"Why?" Peter threw the question back at her. "Why don't we go there? Who's land is that? Is there something in that lake?"

Maybe he had met the owner of the land last night. The kid had looked just like that, an ordinary teenager, but looks could be deceiving. Peter was still not sure if he had been human or something else. Not that he had the slightest idea what something else he could be. Which on itself was worrying. He had thought that he knew his way around the supernatural world. Some water or wood creatures came to mind but he was pretty sure that he would have recognized one of those.

Maybe a fae.

Please no faes, he prayed silently. He hated faes.

It took him a second to notice that Talia hadn't answered his question. She had her brow furrowed and a distant look on her face, thinking hard.

"I don't know," she finally admitted. "If there is something out there, I don't know about it. Just that we …"

"… don't go there," Peter finished the sentence for her. "I know."

"There is not much out there anyway," Talia dismissed it. "Just more forest and the lake." With which she confirmed that she too had been out there just to have a look at why it was forbidden. Most members of the Hale family went through that phase, Peter guessed.

"People do tend to drown out there," Peter pointed out.

"There hasn't been an incident in years."

"Not since the sheriff's department has a close eye on what's going on out there," Peter said. Maybe he should have a look at Sheriff Stilinski as well. The kid had said that he was friends with him after all.

"Peter, what's going on?" Talia put her cup down and had a good look at him. Peter gave her an easy smile.

"Nothing you need to worry about."

Chapter 3

"Where have you been?" Derek asked to which Stiles let out a huff.

"At the cabin," he answered. "Can you believe it? One from the Hale pack tried to dump a body in my cabin. A body! In my cabin!" Stiles himself still couldn't believe it. "He ripped off the door, too."

Thinking about it, he should have made him pay for the door. And for emotional trauma or something.

"Did you get rid of him?" Derek asked, already looking in the direction of the cabin as if he was considering going there to take care of things himself.

"He left and he took his trash with him." Stiles put a calming hand on Derek's shoulder. He wasn't a fan of the Hale pack and neither was Derek but they hadn't been bothered by the werewolves in years so it did come as a surprise that one of them had been suddenly at their shore so to speak.

"Are you going to tell John?" Derek asked but for now, he seemed content with letting Stiles deal with the situation.

"And tell him what?" Stiles made a wide gesture to demonstrate the big pile of nothing he had on this.

"I might if it turns out that this is just plain old murder," Stiles mused after a moment but he doubted it.

Sure, John would take his word over the Hale's but he was pretty sure that there wasn't even a body to find at this point. Besides, he doubted that this was some upstanding citizen of Beacon Hills the werewolf had killed just because. Better not get caught in pack business, Stiles had meant it when he'd said that he didn't want the whole pack poking around this side of town.

However, seeing John brooding over unsolved cases never sat right with him so if pictures of the werewolf or that dead guy showed up on his desk ...

Derek just nodded to that, he didn't care what was going on in town.

"But I should visit John tomorrow," Stiles decided. Maybe he could get some information that way.

If he was honest, the werewolf with the dead body had been the most exciting thing that had happened around here in years, Stiles would be stupid to not look into it.

"Don't get in trouble," Derek said, looking not in the slightest surprised that Stiles wanted to make a surprise visit.

"You know me." Stiles gave him a grin.

"That's why I'm saying it."

"You know that it doesn't change a thing if you say it or not," Stiles reminded him. "Besides, the werewolf didn't try to kill me in the middle of the night at a remote lake so I doubt he'll do anything in town in broad daylight."

"Don't poke the werewolves." Derek gave him a stern look.

"You think I'm not ready to deal with a poked werewolf? Please." Stiles huffed out a breath. "What are they going to do? Kill me?"

"Just don't draw attention to us." Derek turned to leave. "And don't get John in trouble."

"I would never." Stiles grasped his chest in a fake outrage but it was only partly fake. Derek knew that he would never get John in danger, that he even suggested that much ...

Over his shoulder, Derek gave him one last look before he left.

The next day, Stiles returned to his cabin where he inspected the damage to his door.

"You owe me a new door, you know that? Asshole."

Stiles managed to get the door closed behind him without ripping it off the hinges completely but that was only a temporary solution. He would have to ask John to come out here to fix it because Stiles was more likely to maul his hand than to repair the hinges, he was well aware of that fact. And asking Derek would just be as useless. Derek had never really grasped the concept of doors, he would just tell him to leave it as it was.

Inside the cabin, Stiles stripped off the wet pants and put on some dry clothes. Then he grabbed his wallet and keys and one struggle with the door later he was on his way to where he had parked his jeep. Well, technically it was John's but he had given it to Stiles years ago when he'd gotten sick of picking him up at random places. Stiles loved that jeep and the mobility that came with it. He'd never known what he'd missed until he'd gotten this jeep.

He got behind the wheel and eased the car onto the road. It was a few miles into town but there was no traffic on the back-roads at this time of the day.

In town, he stopped at his favorite burger joint before he headed towards John's house. This wasn't their usual day but Stiles knew his schedule and if nothing had come up, like a dead body in a ditch somewhere but he really hoped the werewolf had found a better hiding spot for that, the sheriff should be home any minute now.

Stiles parked the jeep in the driveway with enough space next to it for the Sheriff's cruiser. Then he let himself into the house and set the paper bags on the kitchen table. Already munching on some curly fries, he set the table and laid out the food. He was just helping himself to some coke, no need in letting the ice melt, when the front door opened and the sheriff came in.

"Didn't expect you today," John greeted him but caught him in tight hug nevertheless. Then his eyes fell on the take-out bags.

"What did you do?" He asked with a groan which didn't stop him from snatching some of the fries Stiles had already opened.

"Can't I just come by for a friendly visit?" Stiles asked innocently and nudged a burger in John's direction which got him another suspicious look. Not that John said no to the burger, though.

"You come by for dinner three times a week and you drop by at the station whenever you feel like it." John peeled the wrapper back to have a look at the burger. "So no, you don't just come by for a friendly visit. What did you do?" He repeated the question.

"Nothing, I swear." Stiles raised his hands to show how innocent he was. It was the truth, he hadn't

done anything. He wasn't the one who had murdered somebody to death.

John narrowed his eyes on him.

"What do you want, then?" He asked and took a bite of his burger. "You didn't butter me up with unhealthy fast food for nothing."

He might have a point there, Stiles had to admit.

"I need to have a look at your file about the Hale pack," Stiles said with his mouth full of curly fries. Those were just too good. He would get them daily but John was right with the unhealthy food. It wasn't good, at least for John. And getting them just for himself to eat them all alone was just sad. Junk food was meant for people to share otherwise it was just something a sad and lonely person did. And Stiles was not sad and lonely. At least not sad and lonely enough to stuff himself with curly fries and ice cream while he was all alone.

"What makes you think I have a file about the Hale pack?" John pulled him off his train of thoughts. "Officially werewolves don't exist and even more officially I don't know that they exist and are living next door."

"Next door is living Mrs. Chandler," Stiles corrected him. "I'm lucky her little rat of a dog didn't notice me when I got out of the car, that's a biter no matter what she says. Those are not playful nips. The pack lives out in the preserve."

"The dog just doesn't like you." John shrugged. As far as Stiles knew that little hell beast had it out for him but only him. To others, it was just a barking nuisance but to Stiles, it was an ankle biter. Something in his scent, Stiles guessed, the dog probably knew that there was something up with him but that was still no reason to bite him every chance he got.

"The point is that I need to know about the pack." Stiles brought them back on topic.

"Why?" John asked, now full in sheriff mode.

"Had a run-in with one of them last night," Stiles admitted because he knew that he would have to give him something. Not the whole story, of course, he had no intention to mention the dead body at this point but something.

"What happened?"

"Nothing really." Stiles swirled a fry between his fingers. "One of them came out to my cabin last night."

"Did he ..." John made a vague gesture at Stiles. "You know ... notice something about you?"

"Not sure." Stiles let out a sigh. Maybe he should have kept his mouth shut. "But he knows that I know about werewolves."

"How did he take it?" John asked carefully. They both knew that werewolves kept their very existence a secret, something both of them could understand, but it raised the question of what they would do if somebody found out.

"He tried to threaten me but he backed off when I mentioned that I'm friends with the sheriff." He winked at John. "Then he left."

It was the truth, more or less.

"I just want to be prepared. Just in case," Stiles said.

John nodded to that.

"I have the file in my safe, you can have a look after dinner."

Not that Stiles hadn't known where said file was and he even knew the combination to the safe, Claudia's birthday. As a sheriff, John should know better than to use his dead wife's birthday for his safe but Stiles wasn't complaining.

There were other files in there along with a gun and wolfsbane bullets. When John had found out about werewolves, he had done his research and he was prepared. As far as Stiles knew, the gun and the bullets had been sitting in the safe since John had bought them years ago. Stiles was no fan of the Hale pack but he had to admit that they did keep a low profile. Some might even call them pillars of the community.

"Who are you looking for?" John asked when he got the manila folder out of the safe.

"He didn't tell me his name. Do you have pictures in there?" Stiles made grabby hands at the file.

Over the years, John had built up an impressive file on the Hale family with a dossier about every member but leaving through the pages Stiles found it rather boring. It was a big pack with fourteen members living permanently in the main house. They had property all over the town where some of the extended family lived but the notes on those were more sketchy. Not that it mattered, Stiles was pretty sure that he had met one of the inner circle last night. Not the alpha, the man's eyes had been blue not red, but close. He had carried an aura of authority.

"Talia Hale is the head of the family." John pointed out the pages about her. "Most likely she's the alpha. Her brother Peter is kind of a trouble maker, got arrested a few times when he'd been younger but it looks like he's calmed down." He paused for a second, thinking. "Or he just got better at hiding his tracks."

"That's him." It had been dark but Stiles would have recognized him anywhere. And what John had just said erased all doubt. Peter had moved on from juvenile vandalism to murder but he was better at hiding his tracks. The lake and the cabin were good places to get rid of a body, Stiles had to give him that. It was just that it was his cabin and his lake, well, Derek's lake actually but that was not the point.

"Can I borrow this?" Stiles asked, he wanted to read the file in peace. He had avoided the Hale pack for years but now he had the feeling that it was a good idea to get up to date with them. Just in case. Who knew what Peter Hale would do? He had murdered someone and Stiles was a witness after all.

"You can read it here but I don't want to give it out of my hand," John said with a stern look. "How long can you stay?"

"Not long enough to read it all." Stiles made a face.

"You're coming by for dinner tomorrow anyway," John reminded him. "You can read the rest then. One day doesn't matter, right?" That was the sheriff speaking.

"No." Stiles shook his head. He doubted that Peter would do anything right now. He was probably waiting if Stiles made a move.

"I left my laptop at the cabin can I use your computer?" Stiles made himself more comfortable in

the chair, looked like he was staying here for a while. "I'd like to take some notes."

Chapter 4

Peter left the Hale house before most of the pack was back for the day. He was not in the mood for a full house. He hadn't slept and the events from last night were still on his mind.

On some level he expected the sheriff to show up with some of his deputies. At least to question him. Peter doubted that they had more to go on than whatever that kid from last night had told them, though. If he had told the sheriff.

And even if, they didn't have a body, Peter hadn't killed the guy at the cabin so they didn't have a crime scene and he was pretty sure that nobody had filed a missing person report for him. So far no hunters or other packs had shown up in the Hale territory so chances were good that nobody even knew that he had gone missing around here.

So it was just the word of a teenager against his and with no evidence, there wasn't much the sheriff could do even if he believed the kid.

It might be the lack of sleep but Peter still kept a wary eye on the cruiser with the logo of the sheriff's department on the side when he saw one in town. But it took a left turn where Peter had to turn right so there was that. Not that he was actually bothered. He had been caught more red-handed before. But he was curious what the kid would do. And he still didn't know who that kid even was.

Without much to go on Peter did the one thing he could do. Find out who that damn lake belonged to. It probably, most likely, was irrelevant to the current situation but it kept bugging him that he didn't know. Usually, he took pride in knowing what was going on in Beacon Hills. How he could have kept a blind eye on such a huge part of the surroundings was beyond him and that just wasn't right.

At least that bit was easy to find out.

An hour later and quite a bit of money poorer, why did official offices have to charge for every finger they lifted, Peter left the building with an answer that didn't help him whatsoever. The lake and the surrounding woods had been Hale land in the beginning. At least on paper. Nobody had ever built on that land, the cabin was most likely illegal or not big enough to count, and it hadn't been used whatsoever. At least not in any official way. As far as Peter could tell the Hale pack back then had claimed it but had left it alone. Which kind of made sense, they had more than enough land on the other side of the at that point growing town.

But then one day for no particular reason, somebody named Johnathan Hale had signed that land over to a company. The *Beacon Hills Lake Company* was still registered as the owner of the land.

"What the fuck is the Beacon Hills Lake Company?" Peter muttered when he got into his car. A lot of the businesses in town were owned by a member of the Hale family and if they weren't the owner, they were involved one way or the other anyway. It was part of Peter's job to keep an eye on what was going on in town. Not every threat came with wolfsbane bullets, some came with money and sweet promises and next thing you know, you've lost your bakery. And your house.

However, Peter had never heard about this company.

Drumming his fingers on the steering wheel he weighed his options. He probably should try to find out who that kid was but he had nothing to go on with that and all he could do on that front was to

wait for his next move. If there was a next move.

Every other kid would be hiding in his room, peeking out between closed curtains for the werewolf coming his way. Judging by his reaction yesterday that was this teenager's least likely reaction and that alone piqued Peter's interest. He had no idea what the kid would do and he loved it.

Making a decision Peter started the engine and headed over to the library. Maybe he could find something about that company in old newspapers. Signing over such a huge chunk of the Hale property must have caused some ripples back then. And while he was at it, he should have a closer look at the sheriff.

"Hi, Denise," Peter greeted the librarian when he entered the building.

"Peter." She caught him in a motherly hug. She had been working at the library since he had been a kid and she was one of the few people who never grew tired of his questions. "What brings you here today?"

His usual day to come in was Friday, after he had dropped off Emily for her guitar lesson, and by now he knew how many books he needed to last him the week.

"Bad book haul or do you just need a place to escape?" She gave him a knowing smile. He liked living with his pack but fourteen people in one house, even if it was as big as the Hale house, it could become too much from time to time. As a teenager, he used to hide in the library until Denise kicked him out when they closed for the day. His nightly activities had been, and still were, less sophisticated, though.

"Neither," Peter replied easily. "Just good old curiosity. How far back is the Beacon Hills Daily digitized?"

"We're still on it," Denise admitted. "Somewhere around 1940? Are you looking for something specific?"

"Have you ever heard of the *Beacon Hills Lake Company*?" Peter asked. It was worth a shot, Denise had been around for a while and had always been involved with what was going on in Beacon Hills. Aside from being his book dealer, Denise was a valuable source of information, not that she knew that Peter used her that way. She just liked to chat with him. And with everybody else willing to talk to her. Which was half the town.

"Never heard of them." She made the same face Peter was sure he had made when he'd read that name in the register. "Someone new in town?"

"More a rather old one, it looks like," Peter answered, already heading towards the computers. The Hale pack had signed over the lake a good 150 years ago but before he started with the microfiche he wanted to see if the company was mentioned in what was already digitized. It was worth a shot.

The library was rather empty and Denise was not the only one working so she had the time to follow him.

"Why are you interested in some old company?" Denise asked but by now she was used to him being interested in weird topics. Even if she only got the censored version of his interests. At home, he had a whole library with rare and obscure books. Most authentic books on the supernatural didn't belong in a public library.

"They are registered as the owner of the lake." He didn't need to specify which lake he was talking about, there was only one lake around here.

"Don't tell me you're interested in buying that damn lake," Denise hissed in a low voice and had a quick look around if somebody was close enough to overhear their conversation.

"I doubt it's for offer." He wasn't sure if he would buy it even if it was for offer. Something out there had felt wrong last night and if he was right that something supernatural was living in the lake, it was probably for the better to not disturb it.

That company did not come up in the archive but as Denise had said, the earliest newspaper he found was from 1938. He would have to look at the microfiche for the older ones. At least he had the date when the land had been signed over.

However, since he was sitting at the computer, he typed *Sheriff Stilinski* into the search bar.

"The sheriff?" Peter didn't have to look at Denise to hear her raised eyebrow. "Peter Hale, what are you up to?"

"Just curious." When the sheriff had been elected, Peter did have a closer look at him just to get a feeling for what kind of person he was. It was Talia who maintained the political and social connections they had in town, Peter was more interested in the not official stuff.

John Stilinski, however, didn't have much in the way of not official stuff which was why Peter had left him to Talia. He had other connections in the sheriff's department.

What came up with his search now only confirmed what he already knew about the man. Widower, no children and no family in town. Elected sheriff three years ago.

The few times they had interacted in person he had seemed like a nice man and a good sheriff. Not that there was much going on in Beacon Hills anyway.

"What can you tell me about him?" Peter asked because Denise was the person to ask if one was looking for some good old gossip.

Over the next minutes, Peter learned that John and his late wife Claudia had been high school sweethearts who had married young but that he had lost her two years later to cancer. Denise didn't outright say it but it was clear that that had been a dark time for the sheriff during which Jack Daniels had been his best friend. But he had come back from that and now she only had high praises for him.

"Oh, and he's kind of taken his nephew under his wing."

"Nephew?" Peter gave her a look. According to what he'd read just a minute ago the sheriff didn't have any family around.

"He's from out of town or something." Denise made a dismissive gesture. "But he visits John regularly and he often comes here when he's in town. Kind of reminds me of you." She gave him a soft smile. "Lots of weird interests."

"Trouble at home?" Peter guessed.

"He doesn't talk about his family and I don't ask." Denise shrugged. "This is supposed to be a safe place."

Denise liked her gossip like the next person but she had always known when to back off. A fact about her Peter appreciated, especially when he had been a kid who just wanted to escape his family for a little while.

"Not sure if I've seen him around."

"You would have noticed him." Denise chuckled to herself. "He's a chatty one and if he's not absorbed in whatever he's reading up on this time, he kind of forgets that this is a library."

"Is that so?" That did sound familiar. It didn't have to be the kid he'd met last night but so far it was the first kid he'd heard of with a connection to the sheriff.

However, Peter was pretty sure that this was not the kid he was looking for. He had said that he was friends with the sheriff not that the sheriff was his uncle. But checking him out wouldn't hurt and if nothing else he could cross him off his list. Which would leave him with no names on the list again.

By the time Peter moved over to the microfiche, Denise had to go back to work but she had provided him with a name, Stiles Stilinski, and his preferred time to come into the library.

In the old papers, Peter found one small article that mentioned the Hale family signing off half their land to that mystery company but that was it. It didn't come up ever again.

He would have to tap some other sources but so far it looked as if that company had been founded for the sole purpose of legally owning the lake and the surrounding area. There was no individual name coming up not even an address and it didn't look as if that company had ever done anything. But legally it was still around.

"Interesting." Peter leaned back in his chair.

On his way out he waved Denise goodbye and drove back to the Hale house. By now most of the pack was home and dinner was almost ready.

"Slice the bread, would you?" Deborah put a knife in his hand and shoved him in the direction of where the bread was waiting for him on the counter.

Next to him, Laura was busy with cutting tomatoes for the salad. She was home from college for the week and Cora hadn't stopped pestering her with questions about life on campus. Which she was doing now from the other side of the counter. Cora couldn't wait to leave for college as well but that would still take a few years. For now, she was hanging with glassy eyes on her big sister's lips.

On Peter's other side Deborah was talking to her husband, something about Emily and school, and from the living room, Peter could hear the soft murmur from the rest of his pack. Peter let out a content sigh and started to slice the bread.

Chapter 5

The sheriff didn't knock at the Hale house's door the next day or the day after that so Peter was pretty sure whoever the kid had been, he hadn't told the sheriff. And it didn't look like the body had been found either but he doubted that anybody would find it. At least not this decade.

So Peter turned his attention to other things.

To babysitting Emily for example. The girl had come down with the flu and as a human, she had to suffer through it. Why it had to be him who had to bring her fresh tea and read her story after story, Peter didn't know. Okay, he didn't have a nine to five like the others, strictly speaking he didn't work at all, but even if Emily's parents had to work, Pamela and Walter were retired, why couldn't they look after the kid? Reading stories was basically in the job description for grandfathers but Walter was off with some church thing and Pamela out to buy more supplies for the garden. Peter appreciated the fresh fruits and vegetables but couldn't she let the garden be for one day and look after the sick child? Apparently not which was the reason Peter was stuck with that duty.

He didn't mind that much, his complaining was mainly out of principle alone. But Emily liked the way he read the stories, with sarcastic comments sprinkled in, so he sat with his back propped up against the headboard, the feverish child tucked into his side and read to her until she fell asleep.

When he was sure that she was deep asleep, her breath heavy from her congested nose, he untangled her and slipped out of the bed. He had stains of snot on his shirt and he was reeking of sweat and sickness and the medication he had given her earlier but to his own surprise, he didn't mind. Nothing a shower and a fresh shirt couldn't fix.

Emily was still sleeping when he came out of the bathroom and it looked as if she would sleep for quite a while now. Earlier the coughing had kept her up.

"How's she doing?" Cora asked when he came into the living room. She was back from school but instead of starting with homework right away, she was busy on her phone.

"Sleeping." Peter watched her from the doorway. It hadn't been long since Cora had been a nine-year-old he had read stories to. And when had he become a sentimental old man?

"Being sick sucks." Cora made point of sniffing the air. Even after his shower, Peter was pretty sure that she could smell the traces on him. And that was nothing compared to what Emily was reeking of. Poor kid but at least human kids seem to bounce back from something like this pretty quickly.

"Can you keep an eye on her for a while?" Peter asked. Emily should be sleeping for the next hours, at least, but he didn't want to leave her alone just in case.

"Why don't you do it?" Cora had turned her attention back to her phone like the teenager she was. "I'm going out with a friend in a bit."

"I want to get some books from the library, I'm getting sick of reading this series to her." Emily was enjoying the stories but some variety didn't hurt and it would keep them both sane.

"Can't you ask Boyd or Isaac?"

"They're still at school, lacrosse training," Peter reminded her. "And Erica has work after school. At the moment it's just you and me so you're going to keep an eye on her while I'm gone."

Cora groaned with a hint of a growl.

"Park your ass on that couch until I'm back," Peter snapped at her. "If she wakes up, you check if she needs anything. I won't be long."

Cora glared at him but didn't object. Knowing that this was all he would get from her, Peter left the house. He wasn't worried that Cora would skip out the second he was out of the driveway, she was a wolf after all. She wouldn't abandon a pack member in need. On the outside, she might be all huff and puff but on the inside, she loved her cousin. Well, second cousin. Not that that made a difference.

Peter could have waited with the library run until the rest of the pack was home but this was one of the times it was likely that the sheriff's nephew was at the library as well.

Even if he saw the kid there, Peter doubted that he was the one he'd met at the lake but so far no other name had come up. Peter had even spent an evening with Cora's yearbook but so far no luck. The kid didn't go to Beacon Hills High.

When Peter wanted to pull into the lot of the library, he had to wait for a beat-up jeep to exit first. Peter didn't pay much attention to it, his mind was on what kind of books he should get for Emily and that he might need Denise's help to find something for her, but then he noticed a familiar face behind the wheel of the jeep.

Library forgotten Peter turned the car around and followed the jeep. It was a pretty distinctive car so Peter kept his distance to not alert the kid to his presence.

However, he might not have been as sneaky as he'd thought because the kid drove right to the sheriff's station. Peter drove by slowly but kept an eye on him through the rear-view mirror.

The kid parked the car and got out without a care in the world, though. Peter noticed gangly legs and a wide plaid shirt before he was out of sight.

He dared to turn around and park at the other side of the road, not directly in front of the station but close enough that he had a good view on the jeep. A stakeout in front of the sheriff's station might be a bad idea but Peter was not willing to let that kid go again.

The pack's WhatsApp group was full with new messages so he wasn't just pretending that he was on his phone but he did keep an eye on the entrance of the station.

Cora was complaining that Peter had basically grounded her but nobody bothered to answer to that. So she spammed a few pouty faces but then she moved on to other things.

At least Deborah and Talia should be home any time now so Peter didn't feel bad for her.

He glanced over to the station again but the kid wasn't coming back out.

"What are you doing in there?" Peter wondered aloud. He had only gotten a short glimpse at him but the teenager hadn't looked like somebody who had been constantly looking over his shoulder for the murderous werewolf coming for him for the last few days.

Twenty minutes later the kid still hadn't come out and Peter started to get an uneasy feeling. This was most likely the Stiles Stilinski Denise had told him about so it might be normal for him to pop in at his uncle's work, Peter didn't know. He did know, however, that it would look rather suspicious if he stayed here much longer. He gave Stiles another five minutes but when by then he still had failed to appear, Peter cursed under his breath and turned the key in the ignition.

But at least now he had a name and a license plate, he could work with that.

He drove back to the library but his mind was not on books for Emily. However, he could use that as an opener to get Denise to talk.

Like expected Denise was delighted to show him all the books they had for nine-year-old girls. At the sight of this much pink and unicorns, Peter wanted to throw up. He picked a few that didn't let his teeth rot just looking at them and he even found one or two that sounded pretty cool.

"By the way, did I see the sheriff's nephew in here earlier?" Peter asked innocently. "That Stiles kid?"

Was Stiles even a name?

"Oh, yes." Denise lit up. "He reminds me a lot of you. He was looking for old newspaper articles as well." She shook her head, amused by the coincidence, but Peter couldn't help but wonder if Stiles had been looking for him. Maybe that was what he was doing at the station. Maybe he wasn't there to report anything, maybe he was there to use his uncle to get information about him.

"What was he looking for?" Peter asked while he pretended to be engrossed in the blurb of a book with *princess* in the title. It also read *dragon* so it might not be too bad.

"I don't know, it was quite busy here at the time," she said. "And I usually don't read over somebody's shoulder while they're in here."

"You could have fooled me." Peter gave her a toothy smile. She was nosy but she also knew where to draw the line. "Does he usually read old newspapers or was this the exception?"

"Peter Hale." She straightened up to her full high, which wasn't that high, and gave him a scolding look. "Why are you so interested in that boy?"

He did look like some creep, Peter had to admit, but he couldn't tell her the truth either. So he went for the next best thing.

"Cora, she …" He lowered his voice to a conspiracy whisper. "She's sixteen now and well …" He made a vague gesture and let her fill in the blanks.

"You mean your Cora and the Stilinski kid?" Denise whispered back but way louder than him.

"She hasn't used a name." Peter back-paddled a bit. He didn't want to spread rumors but Cora was sixteen, there was most likely somebody she had hearty eyes for. If so it was nothing serious, though. He and every other wolf in the pack would have smelled the pheromones on her if she were in love. But she was a teenager and Peter had given up on keeping track of the emotional roller coaster she was emitting.

"You keep out of that." Denise pointed with her finger at him. "Let the girl make her experiences. She doesn't need her uncle to give some poor kid the shovel speech. Besides, he's the sheriff's nephew, he knows right from wrong." She paused at that. "Most of the time. But he's a good kid."

"You said he has trouble at home," Peter prompted.

"I also said that the sheriff took him under his wing," Denise reminded him but it was enough to get her talking.

Stiles came into the library at least once a week and he had dinner with the sheriff quite often. And

he visited him at work regularly so his trip to the station today was not out of the ordinary.

"I once saw the sheriff over at that burger place a bit down the street and he begged me to not tell Stiles that he had a burger and cheese fries there. Stiles is obsessed with him eating healthy, it's kind of a running gag by now. Deputy Parrish even said that the sheriff had paid him a twenty just to keep him quiet."

Peter left the library deep in thoughts. Thanks to Denise he had gotten quite a good picture of Stiles. However, he didn't seem to be a guy who was unfazed by blatant murder. So Peter was pretty sure that this was only what Stiles wanted people to see about him.

Peter drove back to the Hale house, by now it was almost dinner time and most of the pack should be home.

"You!" Cora was right in his face when he came through the door. "You said you would be right back."

"Didn't you want to go out with your friend?"

"Yeah but guess what." Her eyes showed a hint of gold. "She left without me because I was stuck babysitting Emily. Which was your job."

"Haven't Deborah or Talia been home by then?" He wondered. He had counted at least on his sister to come home right after work. She always came home right away.

"Mom had a meeting and Deborah had to finish a project, they were counting on you to look after Emily." Her voice dropped into a growl and now there were too many teeth in her mouth to talk properly any longer.

"Cora!" Talia called from deeper into the house.

Cora let out one more growl which was answered by a deeper one from her mother which was enough for her to gain control again.

"I'm sorry," Peter said. He had fucked up, he knew that. "I'll make it up to you."

"You better." She growled at him and then stalked back to her room.

"I just hope Denise isn't spreading any rumors," Peter muttered to himself.

Chapter 6

Stiles hadn't kept up with the Hale pack for quite a while but now he read the dossier John had on the pack, Peter's official file and every newspaper article that mentioned a Hale.

They were pillars of the community. Talia, the alpha was involved with the town's council, several members of the family were active in the community and it looked as if half the town belonged to a Hale one way or the other.

Over the years the pack had taken in several teenagers. The details were not publicly known but John hinted at an abusive background for that Lahey kid and Denise said something about medical bills Erica's mother couldn't pay. The latest addition to the pack was a teenager named Boyd but neither John nor Denise knew much about him. Stiles' best guess was that he got bitten by accident or had to be bitten in an emergency situation.

The Hales were good people, that's what Stiles got out of what he read and heard about them. Except for Peter. As a teenager, he had been kind of a troublemaker but he had calmed down over the years. Denise liked him a lot and she even mentioned that he had been reading old newspaper articles as well just the other day.

"Something about the lake." Denise dismissed his question when Stiles wanted to know what Peter had been looking for. But she had been called away before Stiles could find out more.

Chewing on his pencil Stiles had continued his research but he couldn't help but wonder if Peter Hale was looking for him as well.

From what Stiles found out about him, Peter didn't work. He had finished school with impressive grades, had gone Ivy League with two semesters in England but he had never really worked a day in his life. At least not as far as Stiles knew of.

"He works from home," Denise said when Stiles asked her about that. But what exactly he was doing, she couldn't tell either.

Stiles' money was on some kind of left-hand thing for the pack. If he was right than Peter was the one who took care of any threat to the pack. He was the one who got his hands dirty to keep them safe.

They had met over a dead body after all.

"Do you see me as a threat?" Stiles wondered. It had been a few days and so far he hadn't seen the werewolf. Hadn't Denise mentioned him, Stiles wouldn't even know that he was still in town. But from what he now knew about the werewolf, Stiles didn't peg him for somebody who would run. Most likely he was waiting for Stiles' next move. Not that Stiles intended to do anything.

He hadn't told John and as long as no body was found and no missing person report regarding that man came in, he wouldn't. As far as Stiles knew the man had been another werewolf or maybe a hunter, nothing the normal world needed to know about. Besides, he really didn't want to get involved in pack business.

So Stiles went back to his normal routine with dinners with John, the occasional visit at the station and his trips to the library.

"So." Denise cornered him when he was checking out the shelf with the latest Scandinavian murder

mysteries, those had been popular for quite a while but he'd only discovered them recently and now he was hooked. He'd read his way through Stieg Larsson and was now checking out what else was there.

"Hm?" Stiles wasn't sure what he should make out of the situation.

"You and that Hale girl ..." She gave him a knowing smile.

"Me and what Hale girl?"

"Cora," Denise prompted.

It took him a moment to get what she was implying.

"There is no me and a Hale girl," Stiles squeaked and almost dropped the book he'd been eyeing. "I don't know any Hales and I don't want to know any Hales. Certainly not a Hale girl."

He'd read the name Cora Hale in John's file but she was sixteen and not the guy who had been at his cabin with a dead body in the middle of the night so he hadn't spared her a second thought. Even if he got in trouble with the pack, Cora would be the last one he would be wary of.

"I see," Denise said with a knowing smile.

"Who's saying that there's a me and a Hale girl thing?" Stiles almost yelled. "Because there isn't. I don't even know her. We've never met. The only Hale I've met lately is Peter and that's enough Hale for a while thank you very much."

"Hope he didn't give you too much grief," she said in a sympathetic voice that left Stiles even more confused. "Don't let him discourage you. You and Cora do what you want to do and don't let some overprotective uncle drive you apart."

"I'll keep that in mind," Stiles said because he didn't know what else he was supposed to say to that. Because what the fuck.

Stiles drove back out to the lake, still fuming. Why was Peter spreading rumors about him? Where was this even coming from? Because just like he'd told Denise he didn't know any Hales and he had no interest in getting to know them.

At the cabin, Stiles struggled with the door. Again. John had promised to come out to fix the hinges but he had to pull double shifts because two of his deputies had called in sick and he had nobody but himself to cover for them. Maybe over the weekend. Until then Stiles had to struggle with a not cooperating door. At least it wasn't winter so it didn't matter that it wasn't closing properly. The little draft was quite nice, actually.

Still huffing, Stiles dropped his bag with the books on the bed and had another look at them. Which one to start with?

"So, you're Stiles."

Stiles jumped and dropped the book on his foot.

"Dammit," he cursed, jumping on one foot. "What's with you and the breaking in?"

The cabin was small, almost tiny, but Stiles didn't have a real look around when he'd come in. Peter must have been standing by the stove. Or he had been up in the rafters like a creeper.

"The door was open," Peter offered.

"Har har," Stiles made. "You still owe me for that."

Peter stepped out of the shadows.

"What do you want?" Stiles asked when Peter failed to say anything. At the moment he was inspecting the books Stiles had on his shelf. Which weren't many. He didn't have much room to store them and at the library, he got them for free.

"Stiles Stilinski," Peter finally said.

"That's me," Stiles confirmed, gesturing at himself. "And?"

"You were not lying when you said that you know the sheriff." Peter turned towards him. "But he's not your uncle. I checked. John Stilinski doesn't have close family and none of the family he has lives on this side of the country. Same for the relatives of his late wife. In fact, there is nobody by the name Stilinski living anywhere around here."

"Your point is?"

"My point is that I don't know who you are." Peter stepped closer. "But you know about me and my family. I don't like that."

"You know, it's kind of funny." Stiles shook his head. "The deputies never questioned my relationship to John, they just took his word for it. And then you come along and blow my cover."

"I haven't blown anything," Peter reminded him. "Yet." His eyes wandered down Stiles' body.

"Careful." Stiles closed the gap between them. "You might put more into your mouth than you can swallow."

They were only inches apart now, Stiles felt Peter's breath on his skin when the other man huffed out a laugh.

"You're not easy to intimidate."

"What do you want?" Stiles held his gaze. He didn't know what the werewolf was up to, maybe he did come here to get rid of a loose end, but Stiles would not back down.

"What are you, Stiles?" Peter asked with a tilt of his head that told Stiles that he was listening to more than just his words.

"None of your business."

"I have to keep my pack safe." Peter broke eye contact and took a step back. He moved around Stiles and picked up the book which Stiles had dropped on his foot. Carefully, he put it back to the others. "Are you a threat to my pack?"

"I don't care about your pack." Stiles felt his voice rising. "You were the one who came here. With a dead body. You wanted to dump your trash in my cabin. I didn't start this."

"True." Peter gave him a nod.

"But you know about me and my pack," Peter continued. "And you don't like us." He paused, probably waiting for Stiles to explain himself but for once in his life, Stiles didn't feel the need to

fill the blank.

"Are you a hunter, Stiles?"

"I'm not part of your war if that's what you think," Stiles answered. "But just FYI I don't want hunters snooping around here either."

"I see." Peter gave him a little half-smile as if that statement had confirmed something for him.

"You should leave now," Stiles said and made a point of taking out his phone. "You're trespassing, I should call the sheriff."

"I could kill you before you even hit the first number."

Stiles gave him an unimpressed look.

"If you keep threatening to kill me without following through with that, nobody will take you serious any longer," Stiles told him. "You know, it's a crying *wolf* kind of thing."

"Maybe I should just do it, then." Peter stepped closer again. For a second Stiles was sure that he would snatch the phone out of his hand but he didn't. "Slash your throat and get it over with."

Stiles set his jaw and looked him straight in the eye.

"You would regret that." Stiles wasn't sure who would get to Peter first, John or Derek, but he knew without a doubt that Peter would regret trying to kill him. Some of that must have translated into his expression because Peter backed off without slashing his throat. Good because that would have sucked.

"How old are you, Stiles?" Peter changed the topic.

"Worried that I'm jail bait?" Stiles shot back but he had to give him kudos for still trying to get information out of him.

"I think you're way older than you look." Peter gave him another up and down. "You're not a fae, are you?"

That made him laugh.

"I've been called a fairy before but no, I'm not a fae."

The relieved expression on Peter's face which he didn't even try to cover up made him laugh again.

"You thought I was fae?" Stiles couldn't help it, he couldn't keep a straight face. "That's what you came up with?"

"Since you're not giving me anything …" Peter spread his hands in a helpless gesture.

"Why should I?"

"You know more about me than I know about you."

"That's why you're making things up about me?" His conversation with Denise was still fresh in his mind.

Peter raised a questioning eyebrow at him.

"According to you I'm dating your niece," Stiles reminded him. "You can't just spread rumors like that. I'm not dating a fucking Hale." The rage was back and if Peter didn't wipe that smug expression off his face right now, Stiles would do it for him.

"I needed an explanation why I'm interested in a sixteen-year-old boy. Denise started to think I'm a pedophile." Peter shrugged.

"Sixteen?" Stiles latched onto that. "You think I look like sixteen? Eighteen! I should look at least like I'm eighteen."

"Why eighteen?" Peter asked calmly. He was watching him closely to catch every bit of information he could get out of him, Stiles knew that, but he was done. He just wanted the werewolf gone. He wanted to dig into his books and read the whole night and not care about fucking werewolves in his cabin.

"You want to know why?" Stiles was right in his face. "Do you?" He didn't give Peter the chance to answer. "Because I was eighteen when the Hale pack killed me!"

Chapter 7

"We what?" That was not the answer Peter had expected.

"Yeah." Stiles was poking his chest with a finger. "You fuckers drowned me."

"I ..." Peter had no idea what to say to that. It did explain why Stiles didn't like the Hale pack, though. "Why would we do that?"

Stiles opened his mouth to tell him exactly why they had done it but suddenly there was a figure in the doorway.

"Stiles!" The man bellowed and Stiles snapped his mouth shut. "Enough."

Stiles threw him a glance, not in the slightest surprised by the newcomer it looked like.

"Just make him go away," Stiles said, sounding defeated. He shouldered his way past the other man and then Peter was alone with whoever this was. Another one who had managed to sneak up on him, maybe he was getting old.

"And you are?" Peter had a closer look at him. Just like Stiles the other day, the man was dripping wet but at least he was fully clothed. Jeans and a Henley were clinging to his body while there was a puddle forming around his boots. His wet hair was plastered to his skull and there were droplets in his scruff. He must have come straight out of the water.

"This is my territory," the man said and crossed his arms in front of his chest. He had come in far enough to not block the door any longer but he kept his distance. "Go back to yours. We don't want you here, wolf."

With Stiles Peter hadn't been sure if he was human or not, still wasn't, but with this man there was no doubt. He was not even remotely human. The eyes that were glaring at Peter from under thick brows were old and his whole presence vibrated with something else.

Peter took a quick whiff but he didn't smell anything but lake water and the muddy smell of the vegetation from the bottom of a lake. This was a creature of the water, there was no doubt about that. Now the drownings made sense. There was no wicked undercurrent, it was this creature.

Peter raised his hands to show that he didn't mean any harm. "I'll leave."

The man, or what looked like a man, didn't move and Peter had to almost brush shoulders with him to leave the cabin. For a second he was convinced that he would grab him. The shore was only a few feet away, it would be easy to drag him underwater. But the creature didn't move at all and Peter breathed easier once he was outside and had brought a few more feet between himself and the water.

"Derek," Stiles called out to the man who was now standing in the doorway again, still watching Peter. "It's okay, he's leaving."

He's trying to protect me, Peter realized and took another step back.

"Stay on your side of the town," the man, Derek, said before he turned around and walked out into the water. It was up to his hips when he looked back over his shoulder but not at Peter.

"Stiles," he said. "Come."

"Sorry, gotta go." Stiles grinned at Peter, his outrage only minutes ago seemingly forgotten. "You still owe me for the door."

Peter just nodded and then he watched as Stiles followed the man into the water. Derek just disappeared under the surface but Stiles dove in with a big splash. They didn't come back up again.

Peter watched the surface for long minutes, the ripples had long disappeared and the whole lake was lying calm and quiet again, but neither of them came back up.

Whatever Derek was, Peter didn't want to agitate him even more so he turned around and walked back to his car.

The last minutes had gotten him some answers but they had also raised quite some questions.

He was about to start his car when the sheriff's cruiser came to a halt behind him.

"Great," Peter muttered but plastered a smile on his face when the sheriff approached him.

"Sheriff," he greeted him. "Did I do something wrong?"

"This is private property," the sheriff repeated Stiles' words from the other day. "What are you doing out here?"

For a long second, Peter weighed his options.

"I came here for a little chat with Stiles," he finally answered just to see the sheriff's reaction.

"He mentioned that you've been out here before."

"Your nephew is an interesting person." Peter gave him a toothy smile but he couldn't help but wonder what else Stiles had told the sheriff.

"You're playing with fire, I hope you know that," he said.

"It's more playing with water, don't you think?" Peter asked to test the waters so to speak. He knew that Stiles was involved with the sheriff but he didn't know how much the sheriff knew about what was going on out here. Considering how determined he was with keeping people from the lake, he had to know at least something.

"Stay away from the lake." The sheriff dismissed his comment.

"Yes, sir."

Peter drove home deep in thoughts. In his mind he was already sorting through the books he had on water creatures, however, when he entered the house, he found almost everybody home.

Deborah and Christina were in the living room with baby stuff spread around them. Since Christina had announced that she was pregnant, not that the werewolves needed such an announcement to know, everybody was on some kind of baby high. The pack kept all the baby stuff and it got handed around to whoever needed it and at the moment everything was in their living room. He doubted that a newborn would need shoes right away but he spotted at least two pairs on one pile. If that was the to keep pile he didn't know and he didn't stay long enough to find out.

Pamela, Anthony, and Talia were in the kitchen but they had only started with preparing dinner and

Peter left before he got roped into cutting onions.

Usually, the library was his place to retreat to, nobody else ever went there, but today he stopped right outside because he heard noises coming through the door. And for sure those were not reading related.

"Seriously?" Peter muttered under his breath but Boyd and Erica were too busy to even notice that somebody was right outside. Or they didn't care.

In the end, Peter retreated to his room where he had at least his computer. If nothing else he could do an online search on water creatures. It would at least give him a general idea.

But then he just sat there, staring blankly at the screen, while in his mind he was replaying what had happened at the cabin earlier.

Derek was a water creature living in the lake, that much was clear, but how did Stiles fit into the picture? Peter still wasn't sure if he was entirely human but for sure he was not like Derek. And what did he mean with that the Hale pack had killed him? Drowned, he corrected himself.

With nothing else to go on with, Peter searched for drownings in the lake. He would have to check out the newspapers at the library again for a more accurate result but this would do for now.

He did find articles about people who had drowned in that lake, some had been ruled accidents, some suicides, but he didn't find anything regarding Stiles. If that was his real name. It didn't sound like a real name.

"Peter?" There was a knock at the door and Isaac poked his head in. "Dinner's ready."

Leaving his research for now, Peter went to have dinner with his pack. The table was loud and chaotic, everybody was trying to talk about their day and what they wanted to do with the evening. Peter gave Boyd and Erica a glare just to let them know that they hadn't been as sneaky as they thought, and they were still reeking of sex, but Erica just stuck her tongue out to him and snatched a piece of bread from Boyd's plate.

Laura would leave for college again tomorrow so that was the main topic along with how cute she and Cora had looked in that onesie or this shirt Deborah and Christina had found among the baby stuff. Peter just knew that they would bring out the baby pictures just to prove that the girls had been cute babies in those clothes.

Neither Laura nor Cora were fond of that idea but nobody was asking them.

"I'm going out anyway," Cora proclaimed. "I'm not going to stick around when you start to coo over my baby pictures."

"Same," Laura agreed. "Want to watch a movie? Have a little sister-sister time before I leave?"

Cora made a face, clearly wanting to go but she shook her head. "I'm out with a friend. Had to cancel the other day because Uncle Peter dumped Emily on me, I can't cancel again."

"He didn't dump me on you," Emily spoke up. She was still talking funny because of her stuffed nose but her fever was down and she had stopped coughing. Mostly. And she was eating with appetite again.

"He totally did." Cora threw him a glare which Peter pretended to not notice. It hadn't been a nice move but she was acting a bit over-dramatic here. She had missed out on one outing with a friend.

She was seeing her friends almost daily, he doubted that she had missed much.

Later that night, when the house had calmed down and it was only him and Talia left in the living room, Peter stretched out his legs with a sigh. He loved his pack, he really did, but they were a loud bunch and he was always looking forward to the quiet hours at night.

"There is some kind of water creature living in the lake." Peter broke the silence. Talia had brought out a bottle of wine and they were both sipping at their glasses without talking much.

"What kind of water creature?" She asked, taking his word for it. She didn't waste her time, asking if he was sure, instead she most likely was already thinking about what to do to keep the pack safe.

"I don't know," Peter admitted. "I have to look into it."

"Is it a threat?" Talia took another sip of her wine.

"I think it's the reason we don't go there." Peter got more comfortable in his chair. "We should keep it that way."

Talia just nodded.

"People have drowned out there," Peter continued, not sure how much he wanted to tell her.

"You're the one who was out there," Talia reminded him. "Hope you didn't go for a swim."

Peter just gave her a look.

After Talia bid him a good night and had turned in, Peter poured himself another glass of wine. The house was quiet and he had the peace to let his mind drift.

It was circling around Stiles.

The water creature was self-explaining but how did Stiles fit into the picture? Human sacrifices came to mind. Peter knew that some water creatures didn't just drown their victims. Some kept them as some kind of servants. Was that what Stiles was? Was he the creature's slave?

Peter had seen Stiles around town and he was at least interacting with Denise and the sheriff. So he was kept on a long leash?

The creature had told him to come and Stiles had followed, that much Peter knew. But Stiles hadn't seemed to be afraid of it. And when he'd said that Peter would regret killing him, he had most certainly spoken about the creature.

He stepped outside for a moment to get a feeling for the night but the forest was quiet and he didn't sense any danger in the air. Satisfied he locked the front door and checked the other doors and windows like usual.

Then he went upstairs but instead of heading to bed, he entered the library. The scent of Boyd and Erica still lingered in the air but it wasn't that dominant any longer. Peter opened a window nevertheless before he set his glass of wine down on his favorite desk and settled in for a long night. He had some research to do.

Mainly he had to find out what exactly was living next door and what Stiles' role in all this was. Because right now it looked an awful lot like the Hale pack had fed him to the lake creature at some point. And that didn't sit right with Peter.

He was trying to convince himself that he just wanted to know what he was dealing with, to estimate the threat the creature posed to the pack, but if he was honest, he wanted to know more about Stiles.

Chapter 8

The next day Peter packed some tools and drove out to the lake. He had a door to repair.

He should let things rest, he knew that. Before he'd stumbled over Stiles everything with the water creature had been quiet and peaceful, so quiet that he hadn't even known that it was out there. There was no need in waking sleeping dogs, or water creatures. However, he couldn't stop thinking about Stiles. About the things he had implied. And outright said.

And it looked like the sheriff, who shouldn't know anything about the supernatural world knew at least about what was going on with Stiles and that didn't sit right with Peter.

It was still early in the day so Peter hoped that he would find Stiles at the cabin. Looking like a sixteen-year-old he hardly could wander around town while he was supposed to be at school. Especially as the sheriff's nephew.

Peter knocked at the door which Stiles hadn't bothered to close this time. It was still hanging askew, Peter had almost ripped it off and Stiles fighting with it every time he wanted to get in or out of the cabin hadn't done it any favors either.

Stiles was lying on the bed in the corner, which was more a pile of pillows and blankets than anything else, but now he looked up from the book he was reading.

"You again?" He groaned but didn't put down his book. "What do you want?"

Peter raised the toolbox.

"You said I owe you for the door."

That seemed to throw him off. Stiles dropped the book and rolled to his feet, and almost landed on his ass again when his foot got caught in a ripple of a blanket, but then he bounced back to his feet with a wide grin.

"Seriously?"

"I broke it."

"Thanks, man." Stiles came over to have a look at the tools in the box. "John promised to take care of it but I don't know when he's going to come around to it. He's working double shifts at the moment."

Peter nodded to that and had a closer look at the door.

"You didn't ask ... what was his name?" Peter asked with a gesture at the lake.

"Derek," Stiles confirmed the name Peter had in mind. "He's not great with human stuff. Never got doors."

Peter threw a glance at the lake, the shore was only a few feet away. Could the creature hear them? It had come out yesterday when Stiles had been talking too much.

"What exactly is he?" Peter dared to ask while he bent the hinge back into shape with his bare hands. He felt Stiles watching him with interest but he kept his eyes on the work at hand. The whole cabin was kind of old style, the hinges looked ancient but they were still in good condition.

Peter was confident that they would hold the door just fine for at least a few more years.

"Why do you want to know that?" Stiles asked.

"I like to know what kind of creature is living this close to my pack," Peter answered honestly and reached for the screws to secure the hinges where they belonged.

"His name is Derek," Stiles said stiffly. "Don't call him a creature, creature."

Peter threw him a glance.

"I didn't mean to insult him," he said. "I just want to know what I'm dealing with."

"Why are you dealing with us anyway?" Stiles raised his arms to emphasize the question. "We've been fine going separate ways for decades. Why is a werewolf suddenly on this side of the town?"

Peter had another look at the lake. The surface was rippled by a light breeze but there was nothing indicating that Derek was nearby. Even the bad feeling he'd had when he'd come here the other night had eased off.

"I would like to talk to you somewhere private," Peter said and tried the door. It closed properly with only a hind of fraction when it fell into the lock. A careful tug in the right direction took care of that.

"Good as new." Satisfied with his work, Peter opened and closed the door a few time.

"What do you want to talk about?" Stiles narrowed his eyes on him, completely ignoring the door. Which was a shame.

"You, Derek, the part my pack played in whatever happened to you." Peter shrugged. "And I would like to have that talk somewhere not at the lake." He gave Stiles a pointed look.

"Who says that I want to talk to you?"

"I'm usually at the library around four in the afternoon on Fridays," Peter told him while he picked up his toolbox.

"You think I'll show up just because you say so?" Stiles yelled after him but Peter was already on his way back to his car. With the lake in his back, the uneasy feeling in his stomach was back again. He was not welcomed here, that much was clear. And he was pretty sure that he was being watched. And not by Stiles. At least not just by him.

Peter came home just in time to say goodbye to Laura. Walter would drive her to the airport and they had to hurry if Laura didn't want to miss her flight. So she just hugged Peter, promised to do some studying alongside the partying, a promise she gave with an eye-roll, and then she was gone.

It always felt strange when a pack member left for a longer period of time so Peter watched the car until it disappeared behind the trees.

Pamela was in the garden, there was always something to do there, but otherwise, the house was empty. At this time of the day the others were at work or school.

Peter used the quiet time to go back to his research. He had been able to narrow the creature, Derek, down to a handful of possibilities. He was living in a lake which crossed out a lot of things living in rivers and for sure everything ocean-related was out as well. And he appeared as a man. A

lot of water spirits looked like women, those were out as well. So were kelpies and the like.

But Peter didn't want to assume too much. Just because Derek lived in a lake didn't mean he couldn't have chosen a river instead if he'd wanted to. And one appearance didn't mean that he couldn't take on a different shape as well.

Peter spent the next hours in the library with ancient books. The internet was fine and dandy but a lot of things he could only find in old books that hadn't even been translated into English.

"What are you working on?" Pamela came in with a tray.

"What time is it?" He hadn't thought that he'd been on this for that long but if she was here with sandwiches and coffee, it must be way past lunchtime.

"Almost two." She set the tray down on the desk that was not cluttered with books and notes. Once she had her hands free and there was no danger of spilling coffee over priceless books any longer, she had a closer look at what Peter was currently reading.

The text was in Latin but it was illustrated with woodcuts which showed a Vodyanoy, an East European water creature. This one was pretty high on Peter's list. It was known to present as a man, it could be pacified by gifts and it was known to keep people it drowned as servants.

"Brushing up on water creatures," Peter answered and reached for a sandwich. He had told Talia that there was one living in the lake but she was the alpha, she needed to know. The rest of the pack didn't. In most cases, they never got to know the dangers Peter kept them safe from.

If this thing was a danger to his pack, he was still trying to find out.

"Do I dare to ask why?" Pamela gave him a look.

"Just curious." Peter took a bite of the sandwich.

Pamela made an unbelieving noised but didn't push it.

"They say there's something out in the lake," she said, still eyeing the picture in the book.

It was a not flattering picture of the creature. It had a frog's head and there was seaweed hanging off its sleeves. But it was also known to be wearing wet clothes all the time which was a way to tell it apart from a human. Derek didn't have a frog head but he had been dripping wet. Given that he'd just came out of the water it didn't have to mean much, though.

"Why haven't I heard about that?" Peter wondered. It was his job to know about things like that. Most fairy tales had a grain of truth and for sure he needed to know if there were tales about that lake.

"Just something the adults used to tell us kids to scare us away from the lake," Pamela dismissed him. "There had been a few drownings when I was a kid and our parents didn't want us to go anywhere near the lake. So they told us that something was lurking there that would drag us underwater if we set as much as a foot in the water."

Peter had read about that series. There had been four cases, all ruled accidents. It had been a hot summer and a bunch of young people had been camping at the lake over the weekend. It read like some cheap horror movie, especially knowing that there was something in the water that had killed them and not just some undercurrent. It made sense that parents didn't want their kids to go there.

However, that didn't give him something new to go on with.

Without more information, he doubted that he could determine what exactly that Derek thing was so in the late afternoon, when people were piling in and the house became noisy again, Peter finished up in the library and left the house. Just because he had a mystery to solve didn't mean that he could neglect his other duties.

He made his round through the preserve, checking the borders, but everything was quiet. So far no werewolf or hunter had entered their territory but with that omega he'd killed the other day, Peter wanted to make sure.

Satisfied with that he drove back into town just to make sure nothing was going on there as well. Perks of having such a large pack spread all over the town, he had his contacts everywhere.

Peter didn't solve his pack's day-to-day problems but he had an open ear for them and the information he was gathering this way did help him to keep his pack safe and not just from supernatural threats. If something needed Talia's attention he would relate it to her later that day.

Nobody told him something important today, things were quiet on this front as well. The biggest problem seemed to be that an English teacher wouldn't be back anytime soon and that the substitute teacher would stay for the foreseeable future.

Cora had that class as well and she hadn't been complaining so Peter just nodded politely and hurried to leave before he had to listen to more school-related problems.

There was nothing he had to tell Talia so that evening they were just enjoying each other's company. Laura had arrived safely at her dorm which was the most important news.

As usual, Peter was the last one up and before he turned in, he made sure that the house was safe. Then he went to the bathroom to get ready for the night.

He was just rinsing the toothpaste out of his mouth when he heard something behind him. He shut off the water and strained his ears. The house was old but that was a noise he couldn't quite place. A soft scraping. Metal on metal.

Suddenly water started to drip from the showerhead.

Peter frowned at the knobs which of course weren't moving while he was watching them. Without taking his eyes off the shower he put down the toothbrush to have both hands free.

When after long seconds the showerhead just kept dripping without anything else happening, he stepped over to shut it off.

Somebody was standing behind him. Of course, there was. Peter gritted his teeth.

"What do you want from Stiles?" Derek asked.

Peter turned around and brought some distance between himself and the man standing in his bathroom. Which wasn't a man at all. Like yesterday he was dripping wet and glaring at him from under thick eyebrows.

"Leave us alone." Derek stepped closer backing him up against the wall.

"I don't mean to …" Peter started but Derek didn't let him finish the sentence.

He was quick. The next second he had pinned Peter against the wall, his hand covering his nose and mouth. To prevent him from screaming Peter thought but then water filled his airways.

Peter tried to break free but Derek just pressed his water-hand more firmly over the lower half of his face.

"I wasn't given what I've been promised," Derek said, not in the slightest bothered by Peter's claws slashing at his arm and face. "Maybe I'll take you instead."

Chapter 9

Derek wasn't there.

At first, Stiles hadn't noticed. He had been in his cabin so he couldn't tell for how long Derek had been gone but he was not here now.

"Derek?" Stiles called out for him nevertheless but he didn't expect an answer. He didn't get one. "Great, just fucking great."

Fisting his hair, Stiles tried to think of something he could do. Derek hadn't left the lake in ages. He didn't care about what was going on outside his territory. And now he wasn't here.

It wasn't hard to guess where he was, though. The only thing that had bothered them lately had been that werewolf poking around.

Stiles found Peter entertaining if he was honest but to Derek, he was an intruder. A Hale no less. Stiles wasn't fond of the Hales either but he wouldn't just go out and kill one of them. Because that was exactly what Derek was most likely doing right now. He was out there, killing Peter Hale. And there was not a damn thing Stiles could do about that.

Wherever they were, they were too far away for Stiles to get there in time. By now it was too late most likely anyway.

Stiles wasn't sure how he felt about Peter being dead. He was a Hale but Stiles liked him. Kind of. And he had repaired his door. But Stiles got why Derek wanted him gone.

On the other hand, a dead Hale meant that the whole pack would have it out for them. Stiles guessed that they could retreat to the bottom of the lake for a decade or two but he liked his cabin and he liked his relationship with John. No way was he giving that up just because some werewolves didn't know on which side of the damn town they belonged.

Hands still in his hair Stiles paced up and down. Should he call John? There was a murder going on after all. Not that John would get to them sooner than Stiles would. Especially since he didn't know where they were. Most likely the Hale house, it was the middle of the night after all, but they could be anywhere in Beacon Hills.

Before he could make up his mind Derek was back.

"Where have you been?" Stiles yelled at him.

"What do you think?" Derek glared at him but he looked tired and just done.

"Did you kill him?" Stiles dared to ask and not just because he might have liked this particular werewolf or because of the trouble with the pack his death might cause them at the moment, he was focused on Derek.

Derek didn't like killing people. It had come as a surprise, his whole existence centered around drowning people who dared to come into his lake but that didn't mean that he liked it. It had taken Stiles almost a century to figure that out.

Thankfully they now had an alley in John who actually had the power to keep people away from the lake.

The last series of drownings had been devastating for Derek, four dumb teenagers who had thought that camping at the lake was a good idea. At least after that people had been wary of the lake again but things like that tend to fade over the years and people had started to come out here again. But thanks to John there hadn't been a drowning in years.

Except for today. Today Derek had gone out there to kill somebody.

Stiles caught him in a tight hug. Derek didn't reciprocate but he didn't pull away either. After a long second, he let his forehead rest on Stiles' shoulder.

"I didn't kill him," Derek finally said. "Just spooked him a little bit."

"That's good." Stiles rubbed a calming hand up and down his back. Like always, Derek's clothes were wet so his hand didn't run that smoothly over the fabric but he got his point across.

"He won't bother us again," Derek said but for some reason, Stiles doubted that. He didn't think that Peter was the kind of man who backed down when threatened but he didn't tell Derek that.

Derek retreated to the depth of the lake for the next few days but that didn't bother Stiles. Derek had spent years almost dormant down there.

Peter didn't come back either so maybe he had learned his lesson.

However, on Friday Stiles packed the books he had already finished and drove over to the library. It happened to be just after four in the afternoon but that was totally coincidence. He wasn't sure if he wanted to talk to the werewolf but he did want to make sure that Derek hadn't done any permanent damage to him. Like death.

Not that Stiles thought that Derek had killed Peter, he believed him when he said that he hadn't, but Stiles still wanted to see for himself that the werewolf was okay. He was the first interesting person he'd met in years, so sue him.

Stiles dropped off his books and had a little chat with Denise who happened to be behind the counter today while he not so subtly tried to have a look around to see if Peter was here. Not that Stiles was able to see most of the library from where he was standing. Mainly he saw the kid section on the right and the computer and copying machines on the left, for everything else he had to go deeper into the building but Denise wasn't quite ready to let him go.

"Ran out of books?" She guessed. "You're usually don't come in on Friday."

"What can I say?" Stiles pointed at the books she had put on a trolley behind the counter to get sorted in later. "These are good, I need more."

"You're almost through everything we have in that regard," Denise told him. "If you're missing a particular book, I can get it from another library, you know that. Just give me a word."

"You bet." Stiles gave her a finger gun and then went to have a look at the shelf with Scandinavian murder mysteries. She was right, most of what was on the shelf he had read already but he did find two he hadn't. And he made a mental note to check what else this author had out.

While he was busy with picking out his books, he kept an eye out for Peter but so far no such luck. Not ready to leave just yet, Stiles started to browse the shelves, one never knew what might catch his eye.

"Didn't expect you to show up," Peter suddenly said right behind him. Promptly Stiles dropped the

book he had been inspecting. Of course, it landed on his foot. Biting back a curse, Stiles hopped around but he managed to not take down a whole shelf with his flailing. He counted that as a success.

"What's with you and dropping books on your foot?" Peter asked and bent down to retrieve the book. Instead of putting it back, he had a closer look. "I recommend this one, it's quite good."

"You read history novels?" Stiles took the book back but at the moment he couldn't care less about some stupid book about medieval times.

"I have a wide variety of interests," Peter answered solemnly. "We have that in common, don't you think?"

"How would I know? You've been snooping around in my stuff but I know next to nothing about you," Stiles hissed, this was a library after all. Not that his hissing was very quiet but at the moment they were alone in this part.

"Did you send Derek after me?" Peter changed the topic, his eyes now fixed on Stiles.

"Don't blame me for that." Stiles pointed his finger at him. "That's on you. You came into his territory. You're lucky he didn't kill you."

"Does he visit people in their bathroom often?" Peter asked in a chatty tone but his eyes stayed cold. There might even be a hint of blue in them.

"Are you worried about your dignity?" Stiles stabbed back but it wasn't packing any heat. He couldn't deny that he was glad that the werewolf was alive and feeling well enough to banter with him. "Do you even have dignity?"

"I have many qualities," Peter assured him with a smile that sent shivers down Stiles' spine.

"He is a Vodyanoy, isn't he?" Peter asked.

"Why?" Stiles didn't like where this conversation was going. "Are you looking for a way to get rid of him?"

"I just want to know what I'm dealing with," Peter repeated his answer from the other day. "I like to know what's going on in Beacon Hills."

"Do you now," Stiles muttered. "But no, he's not a Vodyanoy." He wasn't that far off, though, and Stiles wasn't sure if he liked that.

If anything Stiles had time and he liked to talk so naturally, he was talking to Derek quite a lot. His nature had come up pretty early and after a while, Derek had been willing to answer his questions. Stiles guessed, that Peter had his information from books, Stiles had gotten his first hand. But it had been a good guess.

"I mean no harm." Peter raised his hands to show how harmless he was but Stiles just shook his head at him.

"You're the most dangerous person of your pack," Stiles reminded him. "You're the left hand, am I right?"

Peter just raised an eyebrow at him.

"Dude, you tried to dump a dead body in my cabin." This time Stiles made sure that his hissing was actually low enough to not be heard at the other end of the library. "You're the one who gets his hands dirty to protect your pack."

"You know a lot about packs," Peter said without confirming anything. "And I still don't know anything about you." He paused of a second. "Except that you claim that my pack killed you."

"You don't know," Stiles realized. He kind of had thought that his story was some kind of joke they were still telling among the pack. Maybe not among the whole pack but he had thought that at least the alpha and the left hand knew.

"Stiles." Peter stepped closer, his voice soft for a change. "If my pack did something to you, I need to know."

"Why?" Stiles asked but didn't step back to bring more distance between them. Peter was close now, it felt almost intimate.

"Because we pay our debts."

Stiles couldn't help it, he laughed.

Then he made the mistake to look at Peter's mildly puzzled expression and dissolved in a new fit of laughter.

Peter waited for him to put himself together, which took a while because the whole situation was just so surreal. Something that totally went over Peter's head which only made it funnier.

In the end, Stiles had to hold his sides and tears were running down his face but he had composed himself enough to speak.

"Thanks, man, I needed that." He wiped the tears of laughter off his face with the heel of his hand.

"I'm glad I'm able to entertain you," Peter said dryly.

"You have no idea."

"You could just tell me," Peter suggested.

That did sober him up completely. John was the only one Stiles had ever told his story to and that hadn't been easy. Telling Peter would be even harder.

However, Stiles had the feeling that Peter wouldn't just back off if he didn't spill his beans. And if he was honest, he kind of wanted to tell Peter. Stiles wanted to see his face when he told him what his pack had done to him.

"Okay," Stiles decided after a long moment. "But I need coffee for that."

Stiles stuffed the three books he'd chosen into his bag and marched back to the counter. The werewolf followed him.

"I knew you two would get along well," Denise greeted them with a delighted smile. "I bet you have quite some books to talk about."

"We do have common interests," Peter answered for them for which Stiles threw him a dirty look.

"Yeah, we're going to start a book club," Stiles said with as much sarcasm as he could muster.

Which was a lot but it didn't seem to register to Denise. "We're going to hash out the details over a coffee, don't sick my uncle on me, Peter is not a creeper who's out to molest me."

Denise waved him off with a small laugh and Stiles hurried to get his books.

"I was lying about the creeper thing," Stiles said under his breath once he was on his way out of the building.

"I'm not going to molest you." Peter fell in step next to him.

"But you're not denying the creeper part."

"You are aware of the fact that Derek is the real creeper around here, right?" Peter held the door open for him. "He sneaked in and almost drowned me in my own bathroom. That was not a pleasant feeling."

"Try drowning for real." Stiles shuddered at that memory. Damn, he needed a coffee.

Chapter 10

Peter couldn't breathe. Water was filling his nose and mouth and he only managed to bubble out the air in his lungs but there was only water coming back in.

He felt his claws digging into Derek's arm but it was like clawing at a brick wall, the creature didn't budge and kept him pinned against the wall with ease. Peter snapped at the hand over his face but his fangs just bit into water.

Derek said something about taking what he'd been promised but the words rushed over Peter without meaning.

He was dying, he knew that. He kept fighting but he already felt his struggling becoming weaker and dark spots started to cloud his vision. His lungs were screaming and he knew that he was only seconds ago from inhaling the water filling his mouth and nose.

Over the hand on his face Peter looked at the creature looming over him. It was just a blurry face but maybe his eyes were underwater as well, he couldn't tell.

Then, suddenly, Derek let go of him. Like a rag doll, Peter went down, coughing and spitting but he managed to suck some air into his burning lungs.

"Stay on your side of the town." Derek was standing over him but Peter didn't have the energy to look up at him. On all fours, he was gasping for air, the heavy boots just in his peripheral vision. He braced himself for getting kicked, just for good measure, but for a long moment, the boots didn't move at all. When they did move, it was away from him.

Seconds later the shower started to drip again, a sound almost lost in the dripping coming from Peter, he was still coughing up water, but then he was alone in the bathroom. Not trusting the peace Peter stayed like he was for another long moment, straining his ears for any unusual sound but there was only the slow dripping of the shower.

Nobody came running for him either, the house stayed quiet. Nobody had noticed the attack, nobody knew that Peter had almost died right in the middle of his pack. This was his den. His alpha was sleeping just a few feet away and he had a dozen pack members in shouting distance and still, this creature had managed to sneak in and almost kill him.

Peter spit out the last bit of lake water, because that was what it was, it tasted muddy and for sure was not the clear water from the pipes, and dared to slump against the wall. He was sitting in a puddle but he didn't care about his pants getting soaked.

Peter closed his eyes and took a deep breath. It tickled in the back of his throat and made him cough but he could breathe again.

After long minutes, Peter got up. He shut off the shower and then he cleaned the floor as quietly as possible.

When he finally went to bed that night, he couldn't sleep.

That he had gotten attacked and had almost died was one thing. He could deal with that. It hadn't been the first time and for sure it wouldn't be the last.

What really shook him down to his core was where it had happened. In this house, surrounded by

pack and his alpha, he should be safe. This was not the place where he should get attacked. If he died in this house, it should be of old age peacefully in his bed. He doubted that that would be the way to go for him but he was pretty sure that he wouldn't die in this house. At least he had thought so an hour ago.

On a more rational level he had to give the creature kudos. If Derek had attacked him anywhere else, it wouldn't have been this effective.

Peter didn't sleep all night but in the morning he plastered a smile on his face and joined his pack for breakfast as usual. Talia threw him a glance, she might have noticed the bags under his eyes or she did feel something along the pack bonds, but she didn't say anything.

After breakfast people piled out to go to school or work which left Peter with Pamela and Walter again. It was a rainy day so Pamela didn't go out to work in the garden instead she got out the cleaning supplies. Walter and Peter shared a glance and came to the silent agreement that they had something important to do somewhere else.

Peter had no idea what he wanted to do with the day, he was just tired but his mind didn't let him rest, so when Walter asked him to help him with some heavy lifting in the shed, he wanted to sort out some stuff, Peter agreed easily.

Peter didn't tell anybody about the creature invading their home, there was no point in scaring them when Derek had clearly been after him specificly, and in the evening he had composed himself.

The night was quiet again, the smell of rain heavy in the air and there was no hint of a threat palpable. Before Peter turned in that night, he tested every faucet in the house to make sure it was closed properly and not dripping ever so slightly, though. He doubted that that would be enough to keep Derek out if he wanted to come in but he felt better that way.

He had been bone-tired all day but once he was lying in his bed, sleep wouldn't come.

He could almost taste the water in the back of his throat but what really bothered him was what Derek had said to him while he had been drowning him. That he had been promised something. And that he might take Peter instead.

Peter didn't know what to make out of those words. It did sound as if somebody, most likely the alpha of the Hale pack at that time, had promised Derek some kind of human sacrifice. It fit in with what he knew about water creatures. The ones on top of his list were known to take bribes and they could keep somebody they had drowned as some kind of servant.

However, his working theory was that that was Stiles. That his pack had sacrificed him to the lake creature.

It was way after midnight when Peter finally drifted off to sleep. He woke up in the morning feeling even less rested than before and with half-remembered dreams still clogging his mind. He had dreamed about Derek drowning him and he kind of remembered Stiles watching from the distance.

Peter didn't go back out to the lake again but on Friday he dropped off Emily for her guitar lesson as usual and then he drove to the library.

"Peter Hale!" Denise greeted him in a slightly louder voice than what was appropriate for a library and he knew that he was in trouble.

"Yes?" He had been scanning the room for one particular person, not that he expected Stiles to be

here, not after his encounter with Derek but he was looking for Stiles nevertheless. But now Peter turned his attention to Denise who gave him a disapproving look over her glasses.

"I told you to stay out of Cora's business," she told him in a more acceptable volume but still with that scolding mom tone.

"Pardon me?" Peter had no idea what she was talking about but it became clear a second later when she told him in detail how flustered Stiles had been when she had mentioned Peter to him. "Let the love birds be and shove your shovel speech."

Taken aback Peter just looked at her, he was pretty sure that she'd just told him to stick it where the sun don't shine and that made it the bluntest words he'd ever heard from her. She was surrounded by kids all day, she was so used to watching her language that he'd never heard her saying something even remotely obscene.

"You should apologize for scaring that boy," she told him. "He's here, you can do it right now."

"Yes, ma'am." Peter couldn't help the amused smile tugging at his lips when she shoved him into a direction.

He did find Stiles at the history novels.

"Didn't expect you to come," Peter greeted him but he should have stomped his feet to announce his presence because Stiles jumped at his words and promptly dropped a book on his foot. Again.

They left the library not much later, Stiles needed coffee for the upcoming conversation, but Peter got the feeling that he wanted to tell him. Not because Stiles needed to tell his story to someone, even if it was a difficult topic for him and Peter could tell that he was steeling himself for that on their way over to the coffee shop next door, but because he wanted to use it as a weapon.

Peter didn't know what to expect but for sure it wouldn't shine a good light on his pack, that much was clear.

They entered the coffee shop and Stiles made a beeline for the counter without even looking at the menu. The barista greeted him with a smile and asked if he wanted his usual so Stiles was a common sight here as well. Stiles agreed to his usual but ordered two extra shots of espresso in it.

"This conversation is asking for extra caffeine." He justified his order while the barista was making his drink. A monstrosity of caffeine and sugar.

"I didn't say anything," Peter said and ordered a black coffee for himself.

When they had their drinks, Peter followed Stiles to a table. They passed several free ones, they had missed the big afternoon rush, and headed for the table farthest away from everybody else.

When they sat down, Stiles immediately attacked his drink. He had to hollow his cheeks to suck the thick liquid through the straw and Peter had to avert his eyes to not stare at his lips wrapped around the plastic.

Stiles might look like a teenager but according to him, he had been eighteen when whatever had happened to him which most likely had been decades ago. At least. Peter was pretty sure that Stiles was older than him.

However, this was neither the time nor the place to drool over the way Stiles was molesting the straw.

Taking a sip from his own cup, Peter waited him out.

"Derek was here first," Stiles finally started to speak. He kept his eyes on his drink, his fingers playing with the straw. "I don't know if he came here with German settlers or if he hitched a ride with the Vikings, you do know that they have been on this side of the pond way before Columbus, right?" He threw him a glance to which Peter gave him a confirming nod. "He doesn't talk about how he got here but point is, he's been living in this lake long before Beacon Hills was founded. For sure long before your pack came into the area."

"Figured that much."

"Point is, this has been Derek's territory way before your people showed up." Stiles pointed the straw at him but then had to chase the whipped cream dripping off it with his tongue.

"Your pack came here with other settlers and Beacon Hills was founded," Stiles continued. "At first everything was fine, Derek never cared much about what was going on outside his lake and your pack was small, just settling in at that point."

"But we grew bigger," Peter guessed.

Stiles nodded to that. "And people were drawn to the lake. Some drowned which got Derek the attention of the pack. The alpha, a Johnathan Hale, went to the lake to talk to Derek and they came to an agreement."

"They divided the territory?" It made sense. One side of the town for the pack, the other with the lake for Derek.

"Yep." Stiles licked his lips. "Derek allowed them to stay and Johnathan promised to keep people away from the lake. He even made sure that the land legally belonged to Derek."

"The Beacon Hills Lake Company." That one had been bothering him for a while now.

"You've been busy."

So far it all made sense but it still didn't explain Stiles' role in this. Across from him, Stiles was swirling the straw in his half-empty cup. It was clear that they were coming to his role in this now.

"Johnathan promised something else, didn't he?" Peter prompted, Derek's words loud and clear in his head.

"It's part of Derek's nature," Stiles justified whatever he was about to say. "He can't help it, there are rules he has to follow even if he doesn't like them."

Peter had a pretty good idea what they were talking about here but he waited for Stiles to tell it in his own words.

"He asked for a pack member," Stiles finally said. "To seal the deal Johnathan had to give him one of his pack."

"You're pack," Peter realized but he snapped his mouth shut when Stiles slammed his fist on the table.

"No!" Stiles yelled. "I am not pack! I never was pack. I'm the guy who has lost his family on the track, who was new around here, who nobody would miss." Stiles locked eyes with him, his face distorted in disgust. "I'm the one Johnathan Hale grabbed off the street and threw into the lake

instead of one of his precious pack members."

Chapter 11

That explained a lot. Peter sat there in stunned silence while Stiles kept talking.

"I was minding my own business when suddenly two werewolves jumped me in a back alley. I had no idea what a werewolf was, there were just suddenly these dudes with fangs and claws and glowing eyes. I tried to run but you know how well that went." Stiles let out a nervous laugh.

Peter didn't want to hear this but he forced himself to sit there and listen to what Stiles had to say. For all Peter knew he was one of the very few people Stiles had ever told his story to and judging by the desperate grip he had on this cup of coffee this was not easy for him but despite his visible discomfort with the whole situation Stiles kept talking.

"I screamed for help but nobody came," Stiles continued, his voice distant and Peter wasn't even sure if he was aware of his presence. "One of them put his hand over my mouth to prevent me from screaming. I bit him." He shook his head in disbelief. "Bit a werewolf, how ironic is that? Anyway, they knocked me out after that and when I came to we were out at the lake. They had gagged and bound me and there was another man. I later found out that that was Johnathan Hale, alpha of the local pack of werewolves." Stiles pointed with his straw at Peter.

"Anyway, Johnathan was talking to the lake. I remember that. He stood at the shore and was shouting out over the lake. I thought that was weird." Stiles paused, caught in memories again. "Then he came over to me and picked me up. Didn't say a word to me, didn't look me in the eye either. He just picked me up and threw me into the lake."

Stiles stopped talking with a shudder.

Peter remembered way too clearly how helpless he'd felt when Derek had put his hand over his face. He could still taste the water in the back of his throat but that was nothing compared to what Stiles had suffered. Drowning like that? Bound and gagged? Peter didn't want to imagine that.

Peter opened his mouth to say something, to apologize maybe, but Stiles cut him off.

"Don't you dare and say that you're sorry," Stiles said, his eyes too shiny. "Don't you dare."

"Why did Derek accept you?" Peter asked instead. "He could have let you drown like the others." There had been more than enough drownings in that lake but as far as Peter knew, Stiles was the only one Derek had kept.

Stiles sighed.

"Like I said, he has to follow the rules but he doesn't have to like them. He knew that I was not what he'd been asking for …"

"Not what he had been promised," Peter corrected, remembering Derek's words. When Stiles threw him a puzzled look he explained: "When Derek … visited me, he said that he wasn't given what he had been promised and that maybe he should take me instead."

"Yeah." Stiles made. "He could have gone after all of you, hell, I wanted him to go after the Hales. Drown the whole damn pack." He nodded grimly to himself as if the option was still on his mind. "But he doesn't like to kill people so he decided to let it go. As long as Johnathan kept his promise to keep people away from the lake, he was willing to play along. Plus, he now had me to deal with. I might have been a bit scared and traumatized when I came to at the bottom of the lake." He tried

to play it down with a laugh but the haunted look in his eyes gave him away. "I bet I was a handful in the beginning. And I'm the only one Derek has ever kept, he didn't know what to do with me either."

That was another point Peter was curious about. He had read about water creatures who kept humans as servants but nowhere was explained what kind of services the creature demanded from their servants. There were not many things coming to mind. He doubted this was about doing the dishes.

"Does he force you to serve him?" Peter tried to ask the question as tactfully as possible.

"What?" Stiles gave him a look, now clearly amused. "You think I bend over for him?"

"Do you?" Peter asked but at the same time, he dreaded the answer. All this had happened how long ago? Stiles had been with Derek for how many years? Had Derek been abusing him all this time?

And this was on him. Not on Peter personally but on his pack. If he was honest, he was surprised that Stiles was even willing to talk to him.

"I have to stay with him," Stiles confirmed. "But otherwise I can pretty much do whatever I want. He doesn't need me and he doesn't use me for whatever your dirty mind has come up with. We're friends, actually."

Peter doubted the last part, he was thinking more along the lines of Stockholm Syndrome, but he didn't voice his concerns.

"I apologize," Peter said. He didn't use that phrase often and most of the time he didn't mean it but this was an honest apology. "On behalf of my pack. What Johnathan did was not right and I'm sorry that you had to suffer because of him."

Stiles hmmed to that, clearly not buying it. He took the straw between his lips again and started to slurp the last bit of his drink out of the cup, killing the serious mood that had been hanging over them.

"If there's anything I can do …," Peter offered. Like he had said earlier, the Hale pack paid its debts. Obviously, that hadn't been always the case, and now he got Stiles' laughing fit in the library, but they did now.

He wondered if there was a way to free Stiles but on the other hand, he dreaded that option because that would mean cheating Derek out of what little he had gotten. Peter didn't want to know what he would do then. Stiles was right, there were rules so Peter doubted that Derek could just let a breach of contract like that slide even if he wanted to. Best case scenario, Derek would demand what he had been promised in the first place, a pack member, worst-case scenario, he would just kill them all. Derek had proven that he was more than capable of doing both and Peter had not a damn clue how to stop him. If he knew what exactly Derek was, he might be able to prevent him from coming into the house but if he was right with his assumption that Derek had come through the pipes, he could get them wherever a faucet was. This could turn into a real-life horror movie for his pack real quick.

Stiles gave him one long look.

"You can't do anything," he finally said. "And I don't want you to do anything. It's been a long time ago."

"You're still holding a grudge against us," Peter reminded him. Stiles had been way too gleeful when he'd thought that Peter had murdered a Hale.

"Look." Stiles pushed his empty cup to the side to lean forward and face him directly. "You stay on your side of the town and Derek stays on his. It has worked for decades."

Stiles made an attempt to get up and leave but Peter held him back.

"Where do you get your money from?" He asked.

"What?" Blindsided Stiles dropped back into his seat.

"You paid for your drink and you're a regular here," Peter pointed out. "And you have a car. How do you pay for the gas?"

"That's none of your business," Stiles snapped in a low voice.

"Do you steal it?" Peter asked. "Or are you sucking dicks for it?" He gave the molested straw a pointed look. He should not think about Stiles' lips around a dick but damn that was a hot image.

"Why? Looking for a twink to blow you?" Stiles shot back but there was something in the way he was looking at Peter and when he took a little whiff, Peter could smell the arousal Stiles was emitting. Looked like Peter wasn't the only one with a dirty mind around here.

"I'm looking for a way to make amends for what my pack did to you," Peter explained. Money felt like the cheap way out but it was all he could think of at the moment. Maybe he could do more once he'd thought about this a little more.

"I don't want your pity and for sure I don't want a sugar daddy," Stiles almost yelled. "I don't know what you're aiming for here but I'm not that desperate."

"Stiles, where does your money come from?" Peter asked again, more serious this time. "The sheriff?"

As far as he knew the sheriff was the only person who knew about Stiles. He had to at least know something even if he didn't have the whole story.

"Okay, yes. John pays for my gas and my clothes and whatever else I need, he even gives me an allowance. Happy?" Stiles almost knocked his cup off the table but he managed to keep his voice down. "And no, I don't want your money. What you did to me …" His voice toppled over the words, breaking. "Don't you dare and try throwing money at me. This is not something you can buy your way out of, there is no forgive and forget."

With that Stiles stood again and this time Peter didn't hold him back. He just watched him when he stormed out to the coffee shop. Through the window he could see him getting in his jeep he had parked on the other side of the street and then he drove off.

Slowly Peter drank his coffee, he had a lot to think about. Stiles was right, this was nothing he could get out of with money. It was tempting to just forget about it. Stiles had lived, was he even alive, like this for a long time, why should he wake sleeping dogs?

"Because the dogs are already awake." Peter sighed into his almost empty cup. He had woken this particular dog when he had invaded Stiles' home. Stiles had made the best out of his situation, had carved out a small space for himself in what little the Hale pack had left him with and then Peter had come along and contaminated that as well.

Peter finished his cup and got up, he needed to pick up Emily from her guitar lesson soon, but then he noticed the bag on the floor. In his hurry to get away Stiles had forgotten his bag with his books.

He should bring them over to the library, which was just across the street, and let Denise handle this but instead, Peter took the bag with him and put it in the trunk of his car before he went to pick up Emily.

He only remembered that the bag was there when he went outside for his final round around the house late at night when the house was quiet and everybody else was sleeping.

Peter took the bag inside and emptied it on the coffee table. Stiles' books were on top, no surprise there, but the bag wasn't empty after those. A handful of candy wrappers, two chocolate bars and an open bag of Twizzlers came up next. Followed by various pens, all chewed on. Peter was getting the feeling that Stiles had an oral fixation.

A phone. For some reason, Peter hadn't thought that Stiles had a phone. He set it aside for the moment because at the bottom of the bag were loose sheets of paper and a notebook.

"What have we here?" Peter flipped through the book which was almost half full, the pages filled with messy handwriting. The loose pages were printouts of various newspaper articles.

"Someone has been nosy." Peter got comfortable on the couch and scanned the first pages. The name Hale came up quite a lot. It looked like Stiles had noted down everything he could find about the Hale family in the newspapers. Every graduation, every obituary, every business opening, everything that mentioned the name Hale. Between the pages, Peter even found a map of the town littered with red crosses. All the businesses owned by a Hale. There were even crosses on things that officially had nothing to do with the Hale family.

Stiles must have other sources for his information aside from the public library, that much was clear. Some he might have gotten the same way Peter had gotten his by paying a fee at the public office but there were things in there Stiles had no business knowing.

"Are you abusing the sheriff's resources?" Peter wondered aloud. He had seen Stiles going into the station, which might have been more than just a friendly visit.

The fact that Stiles knew this much about his family was scary, Peter had no idea what he would do with all the information, but on the other hand, it was exciting. Stiles had piqued his interest in a way he hadn't experienced in quite a while.

And Peter liked it.

Chapter 12

Stiles stormed out to his jeep. He slammed the door and drove off without looking back. He didn't need to look to know that the werewolf was watching him through the window of the coffee shop.

For a moment Stiles just drove, a white-knuckled grip on the wheel.

What was Peter thinking? That he could just throw money at him and everything was fine?

"Why can't you just leave me alone?" Stiles asked through gritted teeth. Why had he even told Peter his story? What did he expect? That Peter would beg for forgiveness? Aside from saying that he was sorry, money was the only way Peter could even try to make amends, Stiles got that. It wasn't that he would magically be able to leave Derek just because one of the Hale pack acknowledged what they had done to Stiles. Not that he wanted to leave Derek, Stiles liked his life the way it was.

"What is the point?" Stiles asked.

On the other hand, it had been Stiles who had come to the library on a day he usually didn't go there in hope to meet Peter. He could have just hidden in the lake for a week or two, or a decade or two, if he wanted to and just wait for Peter to lose interest. Or to die of old age. Instead, he'd come here.

It didn't help either that he had caught himself staring at Peter's collar bone. V-necks should be prohibited. And the sexual innuendo, Stiles couldn't deny that either.

"I hate Hales," Stiles told nobody in particular but he had to admit the banter with Peter was fun.

Stiles gave himself a few minutes to compose himself before he drove over to John's. It was one of their dinner nights and if he didn't have to cover for somebody, John should be home by now.

Stiles parked his car in the usual spot, leaving enough space for the cruiser which wasn't there yet. Not a good sign.

"Of course." Stiles groaned and got out of the car. It was just his luck.

The second he set a foot on the ground that rat of a dog came yipping after him. Stiles sprinted to the front door but he had to search for his keys which the dog used to bite his ankle.

"He just wants to play," Mrs. Chandler shouted over from her driveway, cheerfully watching while her little devil was mauling Stiles' pant leg. At least he was wearing jeans today, the thick fabric protected him from the worst.

Stiles didn't even bother with asking her to call Buttons back, he just shook his foot to dislodge the dog. With a wave at Mrs. Chandler, he dodged into the house and slammed the door shut behind him. He was kind of hoping to accidentally squish that little monster with the door but no such luck.

"Not my day," Stiles muttered and went farther into the house. "Absolutely not my day."

He went into the kitchen to see what John had planned for dinner, if he had planned anything or if they would order in. With John's crazy schedule lately, Stiles often brought dinner when he came over or they had take-out. Most of the time John didn't have the time to cook and Stiles was banned

from touching the stove. The pancake incident had been almost ten years ago, it was ridiculous that he was still not allowed to use the stove but John insisted.

So Stiles helped himself to a sandwich to last him over to whenever they would have dinner. If they had dinner together today. He checked the clock on the wall just to confirm that John was late.

"Great, just fucking great."

After his conversation with Peter, he had been looking forward to some distraction but no such luck.

With his sandwich in one hand, he used the other one to pat down his pants in search for his phone. Usually, John gave him a heads-up if he was running late or wouldn't be home at all but Stiles might have missed it. Since he had been in the library he had turned his phone to vibration only because that was just common courtesy, right? Nobody wanted to hear loud ringtones in a library. Or worse, people talking on their phones. That was just rude. So Stiles made a point of switching to vibration whenever he was in the library and he did tell off whoever he caught talking loudly on their phone. It was a fucking library, what part of "shh" didn't they understand?

However, his phone was in none of his pockets. Stiles groaned. It must be in his bag which was in his jeep which was outside where most likely Buttons the chihuahua from hell was still waiting to take another chunk out of his ankle.

Stiles finished his sandwich before he peeked out of the window to see if Cujo was still out there. The little bastard was nowhere in sight so Stiles dared to open the door and to dash over to his jeep.

He came back in a few minutes later with a bloody sock and no bag.

"Dammit!" He cursed after he'd once again closed the door right in the dog's face.

He knew that he had his bag when he had left the library with Peter, he had stored his books in there. He had put it down in the coffee shop but he couldn't remember if he'd grabbed it on his hasty retreat or not.

"Looks like not." Stiles thumped the back of his head against the door. So it was either still at the coffee shop or Peter had taken it. Given his luck today and the fact that a lot of his research about the Hale family was in that bag as well, he would bet money that Peter had it.

Which gave him a reason to interact with the werewolf again. Not that he wanted to interact with him again. Peter and his stupid v-neck should just leave him alone.

Which brought him back to the conversation they had earlier. Stiles went over it again in his head. Why had he even said the things he'd said? He had told John what had happened to him ages ago when they had become friends but otherwise Stiles liked to pretend that it had never happened. And then Peter came along and had to bring everything back up.

Stiles closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

He felt the water closing over his head, soaking the cloth they had stuffed in his mouth. He had struggled, he had fought but he had still sunken like a rock to the bottom of the lake. With his hands and feet bound, there had been nothing he could have done about it. He had known that. He had known that he would drown. He had held his breath for as long as he could, his lungs had been on fire but he'd held his breath for just a second longer but eventually he had sucked in the water.

Stiles put a hand on his chest. He could still feel his lungs screaming in need of air but all they had gotten had been water. He had drowned that day. He had died.

With his back still pressed against the door, he slid down until his butt hit the ground.

He couldn't breathe. He was gasping for air but it wouldn't reach his lungs. His chest tightened and he felt the strangled gasps he was making but the sound was lost in the rushing of the blood in his ears. He was drowning again.

Stiles curled in to himself, his vision tunneled and he was just waiting for the darkness to consume him again. To drown him again.

"Stiles."

Stiles heard somebody calling his name but it was distant and muffled which made sense since he was drowning right now.

"Hey, it's okay," the voice continued. "I'm here."

Distantly he was aware that he was manhandled into a sitting position, his back pressed to somebody's chest.

Caught in his panic it took Stiles a while to identify that somebody as John.

"Breathe with me," John said, most likely not for the first time. He had put a hand on Stiles' chest, keeping him close.

It took a while but eventually, Stiles' breath slowed down to match what he felt from John's chest firmly in his back.

Eventually, Stiles relaxed into the solid body behind him, his head resting on John's shoulder.

"You with me again?" John asked but didn't let go of him just yet.

Stiles nodded, not trusting his voice but he did dare to take in a deep breath. His ribs were aching and he just knew that his whole thorax would be sore tomorrow but he drew in the air with little resistance.

"What happened?" John asked.

"Told Peter Hale what his pack did to me." Stiles closed his eyes and once again wondered why he had opened his stupid mouth in the first place.

"I can see how you took it," John said and only now Stiles noticed the position they were in. They were sitting on the floor, John with his back to the wall and Stiles with his back to John's chest between John's spread legs. John had still a hand on Stiles' chest, grounding him. Stiles let out a sigh and relaxed more into the firm body behind him.

"How did Peter take it?" John ask.

"It wasn't what he expected." Stiles couldn't help a chuckle at the memory of Peter's face. "He offered money. As if that fixes anything."

John was quiet for a long moment. Long enough for Stiles to remember that he was living at John's expense. Maybe he should have taken the money instead of laughing in Peter's face.

"I …" Stiles started but he was cut off by John.

"You made the right decision," John assured him. "You would only become dependent on him, that's never a good thing."

"I am dependent on you," Stiles reminded him. "But I guess, I can always go back to my old ways." He craned his neck to grin at him. John groaned.

"Please don't." He made a suffering face. "It would shine a bad light on me if my deputies drag in my nephew once a week."

"I didn't get caught that often," Stiles defended himself.

"Too often for my liking. You were relying on Derek to bail you out way too much." John patted his chest to get him going. Getting the hint, Stiles scrambled to his feet. He did feel dizzy for a moment but John had a strong grip on his upper arm to keep him upright until he had collected himself.

"You didn't answer your phone so I didn't know if you would be here," John said, still a wary eye on him. "We can order pizza if you like."

Pizza sounded good, suddenly Stiles was starving.

John made the call while Stiles went upstairs to take a shower. His clothes were damp with sweat and he didn't need a werewolf's nose to know that he was reeking.

When he came back downstairs freshly showered and wearing soft sweats and a well-worn t-shirt, he kept most of his wardrobe at John's, the pizza had arrived and John had set the coffee table. Looked like they were eating in front of the TV today.

"That bad?" Stiles asked, rubbing the back of his head in embarrassment. Usually, they ate at the kitchen table, dinner plus TV was a thing for the weekends or the bad days. They both had bad days from time to time but today it wasn't John.

"The game is on." John pointed at the running TV without even looking at the screen. Neither of them was a fan and Stiles doubted that John even knew which teams were playing but Stiles took his seat next to him without commenting on it and reached for a slice of pizza.

"Any idea what Peter is going to do now?" John broke the silence.

"No clue," Stiles admitted, puffing around a hot bite in his mouth. "But I'm pretty sure that he has my bag so I have to see him again."

"How did he get your bag?" John asked, suddenly in sheriff mode.

"Forgot it at the coffee shop when I left." When he'd fled the coffee shop to be correct but Stiles didn't say that out loud. "Besides, I think that he's interested in me. If not my bag he would find another reason to see me again."

"Interested?" John picked up on that. "You mean interested or interested?"

Stiles thought about it for a moment. Peter had been like a dog, werewolf, with a bone right from the beginning and what Stiles had given him today would only make him more persistent. But he also couldn't deny the sexual tension between them. And it was not only Peter.

"Both?" Stiles crunched his face. "I think?"

"Stiles!"

He was saved by the sound of running water coming from the kitchen.

"Shit!" Stiles almost dropped his half-eaten slice of pizza. "I forgot the time."

A second later Derek was standing in the kitchen door, dripping all over the floor.

"You're not going to drag me through the pipes, we're taking the jeep," Stiles yelled at him. He had already lost his bag today, no way was he leaving the jeep at John's.

"Sit down and have some pizza." John gestured at the chair closest to Derek. "We have more than enough."

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter wanted to do the right thing and give back Stiles his bag first thing in the morning but over breakfast, his phone rang with an out of town number. Peter excused himself from the loud table, not that anybody noticed, they were too busy discussing baby names on one end of the table while the other end, consisting of the teenagers, was more busy with quizzing each other for a chemistry test today.

"What is it?" Peter answered the phone without a greeting. He had retreated to the library where he should be safe from curious ears.

"Not sure," the man at the other end said. "Might be nothing but you better have a look at this."

Half an hour later, when the house was empty except for Walter and Pamela who both were about to leave as well for whatever they had planned for the day, Peter got in the car and drove two towns over to meet one of his contacts, Bob the owner of a small gun shop.

He did, however, take the time to use Stiles' phone to shoot the sheriff a message that he had Stiles' bag and every intention to give it back but that he was kind of busy at the moment. If there was a good time to drop it off at the cabin?

Peter could drop it off there anytime, Stiles didn't need to be there for that, but Peter would have liked to give it to him in person. He wasn't exactly sure what he was hoping to achieve with that but he wanted to see Stiles again. Just to make sure that he was okay, his retreat yesterday had been a bit too hasty to just shrug it off.

The sheriff answered a few minutes later. He said that without Stiles having his phone, he wasn't able to reach him and he couldn't give a good time for a drop-off except that they would have dinner together tomorrow.

Come by at the station around noon, the sheriff wrote. *I would like to talk to you anyway*

Peter read the message with a smile.

"Aren't we a nosy one," he said and wrote back that he would be there. He still didn't know how much Stiles had told the sheriff but after their encounter near the lake where the sheriff had confirmed that Stiles had mentioned Peter to him, it didn't come as a surprise that the sheriff wanted to have a closer look at him.

Peter put Stiles' phone back in the bag which he put in the trunk of his car. He doubted that anybody would go into his room while he wasn't there but with his luck, somebody needed a book or something while he wasn't home and stumbled over the bag. No need to risk that. Stiles' research would be hard to explain and Peter didn't want Talia or the rest of the pack to get worried about somebody snooping around. And maybe he would take a little detour on the way back just to check if Stiles was in his cabin.

The ride to the gun shop was not that long but it did give Peter time to think. Where was Stiles when he wasn't in his cabin or in town? He was at the cabin quite often but his scent had not been so prominent in there that Peter thought that he lived there. The cabin didn't look like somebody lived there permanently. If he had to guess, he would say that it was Stiles' retreat.

The only other place he could think of was the sheriff's house but Denise and now the sheriff himself had confirmed that Stiles didn't live there.

"Does he keep you at the bottom of the lake?" Peter wondered out loud. Was Stiles stuck under water most of the time? That was not a pleasant thought. Peter remembered way too clearly the feeling of drowning. And according to Stiles, he had drowned in that lake. Was he forced to stay where he'd died? A constant reminder of his death? Peter shuddered at that thought.

Peter parked the car in front of the gun shop but he needed a moment to bring his mind back to the task at hand.

"What do you have?" Peter greeted the man behind the counter. At the moment, the shop was empty so they could speak freely.

"Two guys." Bob didn't waste time with platitudes either. "Came in yesterday. Worn jeans, flannel, could use a shower, you know the type. Said they were hunting buck. Mentioned that they were heading to Beacon Hills."

Peter did know the type. Most were just that, simple men with simple pleasures, but some were not out for buck.

"What makes you think that they're not just on a hunting trip?"

"Aside from them heading to Beacon Hills?" Bob adjusted his trucker cap. He was exactly the type he'd just described, not that Peter would point that out to him, and for sure he was not just a harmless hunter out for buck on the weekend. But at least he wasn't a hunter who had it out for werewolves either.

"Ain't as stupid as I look." Bob gave him a toothy smile from behind his salt and pepper beard. "Folks switched to French when talking among themselves but I've been dealing with that witch from New Orleans long enough to know some stuff. Mountain ash came up and silver."

"You got footage of them?"

Peter left the gun shop not much later with video footage of the two men. It didn't have audio but the quality was way better than from the usual surveillance camera, he could work with that.

On his way back into town, he made that little detour out to the lake.

Stiles' jeep was parked a little out of sight, easy to miss from the road, which meant that Stiles was most likely home. If this counted as home. Peter let out a bitter huff.

There was no heart-beat indicating that somebody was in the cabin but Peter tried the door nevertheless. It was locked and the door didn't budge. Not that he was trying to rip it off again.

"Stiles?" Peter called out but he didn't get an answer. There was a light breeze leaving the surface of the lake in ripples but aside from the usual critters, Peter didn't sense anybody around. Even the feeling of not being welcomed here was just a little nagging on the back of his mind.

"Stiles?" Peter tried again, louder this time. Still no answer.

He could just leave Stiles' bag at the door, Peter doubted that anybody would stumble over it and steal it, but that didn't seem right.

In the end, Peter ripped out an empty page of Stiles' notebook and wrote him a message:

Since I missed you here, I'm going to drop off your bag at the station

For a moment he was pondering to add more but then he just signed it and slipped it under the door. With one last look around, Peter shouldered the bag and walked back to his car.

Before he drove over to the station, he got out Stiles' phone. Aside from the sheriff and the library Stiles had only a garage and a few fast food places in his contacts. It was kind of sad, actually.

Peter added his own number to the short list and shot himself a message to get Stiles' number as well. Satisfied with that, Peter put the car in reverse and brought it back on the road.

Peter had his run-ins with the former sheriff but that had been in his teenage years. Since then he'd been to the sheriff's department only a couple of times, mainly on behalf of various pack members. The last time had been to aid Isaac when they had questioned him about his father's death.

The way Sheriff Stilinski had been looking at Peter, it had been clear that he had known that Isaac was not the one he should be interrogating but aside from that hunch, there had been no reason to question Peter. He was not that sloppy.

I'd beg to differ, he could almost hear Stiles' voice in his mind.

"Shut up," Peter said to the imaginary Stiles while he walked up to the entrance.

Looked like most of the station was on lunch break, aside from the clerk behind the desk and one deputy in the back, there was nobody in sight.

The clerk looked up when he approached her.

"Hi, Nancy," he greeted her with a winning smile. "Is the sheriff in?"

Her last name wasn't Hale but she was family and with that pack. And she was one of his contacts in the station.

"He said that you would come by." She gestured at the closed door with the word *Sheriff* written on it. "Something I should know about?" She lowered her voice but Peter doubted that the deputy, Parrish if he wasn't mistaken, had even noticed that he'd come in. He was pretty engrossed in his phone.

"No," Peter assured her. "Met his nephew at the library yesterday and he forgot his bag." He lifted said bag to emphasize his words. "Heard he comes here quite often?"

Since Peter didn't want to draw too much attention to Stiles, he hadn't used his contacts at the station. He doubted that they knew more about Stiles than that he was the sheriff's nephew anyway.

"He brings him lunch a few times a week," Nancy confirmed his assumption. "Over the summer he helps out from time to time, filing and things like that. Why?"

"Just curious."

She didn't believe him but when he just smiled at her, she sighed and waved him through.

"Sheriff Stilinski?" Peter knocked at the door and poked his head in.

"Ah, Peter. Come in." The sheriff gestured for him to come closer.

Peter closed the door and took a seat.

"Stiles left in a haste yesterday." Peter put the bag in the second chair. "Hope he's okay?"

At that, the sheriff made a pained face and leaned back in his chair. He had time to prepare himself for this conversation but now it looked as if he was still pondering his options.

"He's okay now, " Sheriff Stilinski finally said.

"I didn't mean to upset him," Peter said honestly.

"It was his idea to tell you, I get that." The sheriff nodded. "But you were pushing."

"Can't deny that, Sheriff."

"Call me John, please." The sheriff gave him a weak smile. "Looks like we're sharing some secrets now."

"How did you get into this, John?" Peter asked. "Why are you pretending to be his uncle?"

"Rookies get the easiest and most boring jobs," he said after a long pause.

"Like patrolling an empty back-road in the middle of the night." Peter had been hiding under some bushes from a young deputy not that long ago.

"It keeps people from the lake." John shrugged. "At least most of the time." He gave Peter a look.

"Rookies also get send out to deal with teenage shoplifters," he continued.

So Stiles had been stealing to get by before John had taken him in.

"And you adopted the delinquent?"

"We kind of adopted each other." John's face darkened, there was more to the story that much was clear but that expression left his face quickly and he straightened up. "Anyway. Stiles told me that you're interested in him."

That was unexpected. Peter blinked at him, not sure what to say to that.

"Stiles doesn't look like it but he's older than the two of us together he can do pretty much whatever he wants with whoever he wants."

"That's not what I expected you to say." Peter dared to relax. "But I can assure you, my interest in him is not of that nature." Not for the main part but he didn't say that.

At that John snorted. "Yeah, same for him."

Whatever that meant.

"However …" John leaned to the side and opened a drawer. He put a single bullet in the middle of his desk. Peter almost laughed at the gesture but then he caught the scent. Wolfsbane.

"Your pack has hurt him deeply. Your alpha drowned him like a rat just to cheat his way out of a debt." John's voice was stone-cold. "He had a flashback last night."

"I …" Peter didn't know what to say. For some reason, it had never occurred to him that the sheriff

might know about werewolves as well. After Stiles' revelation yesterday it shouldn't come as such a surprise, though.

"This is not a shovel speech," John clarified. "What you and Stiles are doing is none of my business but if you're playing games with him, if you or Talia or somebody else from your pack is using him for whatever I want you to know that Derek is not the only one you should worry about."

"Understood, sir."

Peter left the station with an uneasy feeling in his stomach, this had not turned out as expected.

He was just about to start his car when his phone beeped with a new message.

There's a Stiles here looking for you, Cora wrote. *He says you have his bag?*

Chapter End Notes

NaNoWriMo starts next week. I'm going to finish this story and my other one over the month so there will be more frequent updates in December. There will be updates over November but I'm not sure when I'll have the time for those. Please be patient with me.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the delay, I'm still hungover from NaNoWriMo. I'll have to figure out a schedule but I have lots of chapters just waiting to get posted so stay tuned, there will be more soon.

Peter cursed under his breath but wrote Cora that he was on his way.

What was Stiles doing at the house? He had been the one who had emphasized more than once that they should each stay on their side of the town and now he was at the Hale house? Okay, it was the best place to look for Peter, he had to admit that.

In his head, Peter was calculating who could be home at this time of the day. It was just after noon, the kids should be all at school and the adults at work. He didn't know if Walter or Pamela were home for lunch, though. Why was Cora even at the house? She should be at school.

Peter pushed it and was back home in no time. He parked right next to the beat-up jeep that told him that Stiles was still here.

"Hello?" He asked into the empty house when he entered the front hall.

The house was quiet. It didn't look like Pamela or Walter were here but he didn't pick up on Cora or Stiles either. Peter made his way through the house and found them on the back porch. They were talking to each other but stopped before he was close enough to make out the words. He heard Cora giggling, though.

"You two having fun?" Peter came out the back door where they were sitting next to each other on the stairs.

"You weren't here so I made do with who I got." Stiles turned until he could lean his back against one of the posts framing the stairs. "And I don't see my bag." Stiles narrowed his eyes on him.

"You were a few minutes too late, I'd just dropped it off with your uncle." Peter mimicked his nonchalant position by leaning his shoulder against the door frame. "Didn't expect you to show up here."

"I'm full of surprises." Stiles grinned at him.

"And you're making friends." Peter's eyes flickered over to Cora who was watching the exchange with interest.

"Just friendly small talk," Stiles assured him. "You know, getting to know each other. Since we're supposed to be dating and all that."

That made Cora giggle again.

"I'm never going to live that down, am I?" Peter shook his head.

"Nope."

"Why were you telling people that Stiles and I are dating anyway?" Cora wondered. "We don't even know each other."

"It was a necessary lie at that point."

"You're just weird." Cora got up. "Anyway, nice meeting you, Stiles." With that, she shouldered her way past Peter.

Before he hadn't paid much attention to her, his focus had been on Stiles but now he couldn't ignore her scent. The hormone cocktail of a teenager in love, somebody had been fooling around. Peter wasn't able to get a reading of the other person involved, Cora was emitting too many pheromones of her own, but the other scent was female, no doubt about that. Interesting.

However, that had to wait until later. First, he had to get Stiles away from here before other nosy pack members came back home.

"I thought you don't go here," Peter said and pushed himself off the door frame. With a tilt of his head, he indicated Stiles to follow him down the stairs. Stiles got up as well and the way he was looking at the house he got that Cora was most likely still close enough to hear every word.

"As I said, I'm full of surprises." Stiles walked with him away from the house. "The house has changed a lot since I've been here the last time." He waved his hand in the general direction as if Peter didn't know which house he meant.

"You've been here before?" The way Stiles had been talking, he hadn't set a foot on this side of the town in ages.

"I come here to have a look from time to time, last time in the fifties, I think, might have been the early sixties, whatever. Haven't cared to come here since then." He had another look over his shoulder. "Back in Johnathan's days, it has been way smaller. They demolished that one eventually and built this one."

"Did Johnathan ever see you?" Peter wondered. He would have loved to witness that. Johnathan's expression must have been priceless.

"Not at first." Stiles shook his head, a distant look on his face. "The first year or so I barely left the lake. But then I started to explore the town. Derek had told me about the Hale pack, I didn't have a clue who or what they were when those werewolves grabbed me so one day I wanted to see for myself. I didn't dare to get too close, Derek had said that they would be able to hear and smell me long before they saw me." He looked around, probably estimating the distance to the house. "Didn't see shit." He laughed to himself. "But I did run into one of the guys Johnathan had with him in town someday. He looked as if he was seeing a ghost."

"I can imagine."

"It is possible that I kind of started to haunt them." There was an evil glint in his eye. "Johnathan and his two henchmen, I mean. It got even funnier after they tried to kill me again."

"Can you be killed?" Peter wondered.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Stiles just grinned at him.

"I want to know everything about you," Peter countered. It was true. He wanted to know if Stiles

could die or if he was kind of immortal, he couldn't help it, his brain just worked like that. He wanted to know every little detail, wanted to fill in every blank so that he knew exactly what he was dealing with. With Stiles, however, he wanted to hear things like this as well. Fun little stories, the things that made him laugh and what made him sad, he wanted to know everything. It was kind of exciting and scary at the same time because it had been a long time since he'd been actually interested in a person. Most of the time he just wondered if somebody posed a threat or how he could manipulate and use somebody.

Stiles threw him a glance.

"Do you want to know how I sound when I come?"

Peter's foot must have gotten caught in a rabbit hole. He stumbled a few steps before he was able to catch himself.

"Thought werewolves were supposed to be graceful." Stiles laughed but kept walking as if the incident just now had never happened. They were rounding the house and their cars came back in sight.

"You did go through my stuff before you handed my bag over to John, didn't you?" Stiles changed the topic.

"Of course." Peter saw no point in lying, Stiles would have done the same.

"And you're not worried about me?" Stiles wondered. "You're the pack's left hand, you should be worried when you find someone gathering information about your pack like this."

"I doubt you're going to act on that information, you just want to have it. Just in case."

"Takes one to know one." Stiles gave him a knowing nod. "You're gathering information about me as well. And Derek. Found out what he is by now?"

"A limnad?" Peter asked the first thing popping into his mind. It was on his list of possibilities but it didn't quite fit what he knew about Derek so far.

"Nope." Stiles let the word pop. They were back at the cars. "I should leave, this is not my side of the town. And I have a bag to pick up."

Peter nodded to that, there wasn't much he could say. And he just knew that Cora had been circling the house with them and was now watching them from behind a window. Not that he was thinking of doing something stupid like kissing Stiles goodbye. His gaze flickered to Stiles' lips but Peter forced himself to look somewhere else. He was not a horny teenager.

"You didn't answer my question." Stiles hopped into the driver's seat and closed the door. "See you around." With that, the jeep came to live and Stiles slammed it in reverse.

"You're impossible, you know that?" Peter told him which got him another grin and then Stiles left. Peter watched him for a few seconds but then he turned back to the house.

"So that's the sheriff's nephew." Cora didn't even try to hide the fact that she'd been watching them. "What's the deal with him?"

"Nothing," Peter said but that wouldn't get her off his back. "We met at the library and we started talking, that's all."

"It still doesn't explain your necessary lie," Cora repeated his words back to him.

"I wanted to know who he is," Peter explained which was actually the truth. "It's my job to know the people around here and he's the sheriff's nephew. Denise got nosy and I could hardly tell her why I wanted to know about him. That you and Stiles are dating was her idea, I just didn't correct her."

"And what if people hear about it? Have you thought about that?" Cora asked louder than necessary. Her fingers were twitching as if she wanted to throw fists.

"People or one certain person?" Peter made a point of sniffing the air. Cora froze. "And it's fresh, that's why you've been skipping school?"

"I ... I ... didn't ..." She started but broke off after a second, there was no point in lying. "Don't tell mom."

"Two things." Peter took pity on her. "Three, actually. First, don't come home when you skip school, I thought you're smart enough for that. Second, don't skip school. You can fool around after school, better for your grades and less likely to make Talia suspicious." He made a pause. "And thirdly, if you don't want to out yourself to the whole pack, watch your scent."

At that, all the color left her face and she was staring at him with huge eyes.

"Don't tell mom!" She squeaked. "I'm not ready. I don't even know if ... I mean I shouldn't ... it's wrong, I'm wrong." Gone was the teenager in love, the only thing Cora was emitting now was anxiety and panic. Peter's nose was clogged with the bad emotions coming off her.

He couldn't stand it, his wolf whined in distress at her distress. Without even thinking, he closed the gap between them and closed his arms around her.

"You're not wrong," he said. "You're just fine the way you are."

"I don't want to be different." She was hugging him back now and Peter smelled tears.

"You're a werewolf, you should be used to being different," he joked in hope to lighten the mood. This was not what he'd signed up for, this was Talia's job. She was the alpha and Cora's mother, if anybody, she should be holding her daughter through this. But no, here he was, holding his crying niece.

"As a werewolf, I'm not alone," she whispered into his chest. She had a point there. There were a few pack members Peter knew or at least suspected were not straight but none of them had outed themselves.

"You're not alone in this either," Peter said with a sigh. Looked like they had to talk about this.

"Yeah?" Cora made. "Who?"

"I for example." He had never made a secret out of it but it had been a long time since he'd been interested in anyone.

"You?" Cora brought some distance between them. "Stop making fun of me."

"I'm not."

"You were married." Of course, she had to bring that up now. "You loved Aunt Olivia, we all felt

your grief for months when she died."

Peter felt his jaw working, he did not want to think of Olivia right now but Cora had put her out there and now he had to say something to that.

"I loved her very much, still do." His voice sounded a bit raspy in his own ears. "But that doesn't change the fact that I've always liked men as well. I'm bisexual."

He had never thought that he would have to come out to his niece like this but today was strange like that. He was holding her gaze while she was searching for the lie. Which she wouldn't find. This might have been the most honest thing he'd said in quite a while.

After a long moment of doubt, she broke out in a huge smile.

"I think, I'm a lesbian," Cora said proudly but the next second she slapped her hands over her mouth as if she wanted to stuff the words back in. "Don't tell Mom. Don't tell anybody."

"Of course not."

She let out a breath, her relief washing over Peter.

"Thank you."

She mumbled something about homework and turned to leave but then she stopped.

"By the way, that advice with the scent?" She sniffed the air. "That goes both ways."

Chapter 15

Do you want to know how I sound when I come?

Stiles wanted to bang his head against the steering wheel. Why had he said that? Was he out of his mind? Okay, Peter had said similar things back at the coffee shop but that was not the point. The point was that Stiles shouldn't encourage him, he should just stay on his side of the town and forget about the stupid werewolf.

Stiles drove over to the station, he wanted his bag back. And then he wanted to retreat to his cabin and bury himself in some books. And for sure he did not want to think about a certain werewolf any longer. Stiles stormed into the station, his mind still on that stupid thing he'd said which he totally shouldn't have said but he had said anyway.

"Hi, Nancy," Stiles greeted her when he was rushing past the front desk. He opened the door to the sheriff's office with a bit too much force, the knob slipped out of his, and the door banged against the wall. From his place behind the desk, John looked up at him, not in the slightest surprised.

"Peter was here?" Stiles asked but by then he'd spotted his bag, sitting in a corner. "At least he wasn't lying."

Stiles closed the door more carefully and then he slumped down in one of the chairs in front of the desk to check if everything was still where it belonged.

"He went through my stuff," Stiles told John. Even if Peter hadn't admitted it, he could tell. His papers were not in the right order and for sure he would have never packed them in such a neat way.

"At least he didn't eat my Twizzlers." Stiles fished one out and stuffed it in his mouth. He grinned broadly at John with the candy handing out of his mouth.

"So he knows that you've been looking into the Hales?" John asked and put whatever he'd been working on aside.

"He went through most of my research on them." Stiles shrugged "But he didn't seem worried."

At that, John perked up. "You've seen him? When?"

"Just now, went out to the Hale house, looking for him." Stiles rolled the candy from one side of his mouth to the other.

"You went where? Are you insane?" John raised his voice but lowered it again with a worried glance at the door. "You've been avoiding the Hales for how long? Why did you have to go there now? Peter's dangerous. The whole pack is dangerous."

"What are they going to do?" Stiles became serious. "Kill me? Lock me up?"

"Don't piss them off," John warned him. "What if they come after Derek?"

"They're werewolves, not hunters," Stiles reminded him. "Besides, Peter still has no idea what he is. Even if he knew, coming after Derek would be the stupidest thing he could do. And he knows that. No, at the moment he's only interested in me."

"Yeah." John leaned back in his chair. "I noticed that."

"Why? Did he say something? What did he say?" Stiles almost choked on the rest of the Twizzler but he was sitting on the edge of his seat now.

"You're acting like a teenager with a crush, you know that?" John threw him an amused glance.

"I am a teenager, everybody here in the station will confirm that."

"You're not denying the crush part," John pointed out and reached for his work again. "Would you excuse me? I still have work to do."

"You didn't answer my question. Why is nobody answering my questions?" Stiles threw up his hands in frustration.

"Maybe you should ask him directly," John suggested, eyes already on his work, the conversation was over.

"He's the one who's not answering my questions in the first place," Stiles muttered but he did grab his bag and stormed out of the office.

By the time Stiles reached his cabin, he had cooled off. He kicked off his shoes and stretched out on his bed. He had wanted to dig into his books but he wasn't in the mood for that any longer. For a moment, he was just staring at the ceiling but then he rolled to his side and reached for his bag. Maybe some mindless Candy Crush would help him clear his mind.

However, when his phone came to life he found his contacts still open.

"That bastard."

Peter had added himself to his contacts and he'd sent himself a message so he did have Stiles' number now as well.

What makes you think that I want to have you in my contacts? Stiles wrote.

Nobody is forcing you to use it, came the prompt answer. Y*ou can delete it if you want*

I'm going to do that, Stiles threatened.

That's your decision

Stiles was holding his phone in his hand for a long minute and did not delete Peter's number.

It might come in handy at some point he told himself. Besides, Peter was right, just because it was there didn't mean that he had to use it. He had the number of that pizza place in there, the one with the awful pizzas that always came burned on the top and raw on the bottom, he hadn't used that one in years. It had just quietly been sitting in his contact since forever. On a whim, Stiles deleted it now. He couldn't even remember why he'd saved it in the first place, the pizza there was just awful.

Do you still want to hear the answer? Peter wrote.

What answer? Stiles played dumb as if he'd already forgotten about that throwaway remark.

The answer is yes

Stiles stared at the screen until it went dark. That was not the answer he'd expected. They had been circling each other, yes, and there had been a palpable sexual tension hanging over them but they were not supposed to act on it. Peter was not supposed to say things like that. They joked around but they never admitted things like that.

If you send me a dick pic I will delete you, Stiles wrote because he didn't know what to say to the other thing.

Please, what are you thinking of me?

Only the worst

Peter sent him a crying emoji.

Stiles couldn't handle this. He threw the phone away but ten seconds later he had it back in his hand.

Since you're determined to talk to me, entertain me, Stiles demanded. He needed some distraction. Since it was Peter he needed to get distracted from it might be a bad idea to ask him to distract him but now Stiles wanted to know how the werewolf would react.

Do you have something in mind?

Aside from dick pics?

Would you stop with the dick pics?

Stiles thought that this was it, Peter would not answer again because how else than with a dick pic could he possibly answer now?

To his surprise Peter changed topics completely and asked about one of the books Stiles had picked out the other day. If he'd started it and if so how he liked it.

Stiles hadn't started with that one but he told Peter about the book he was currently reading. And that he wanted to read the one Peter had recommended to him next. The one he dropped on his foot? Peter remembered that one and he was looking forward to hear what Stiles thought about it.

Stiles didn't know how it happened but he talked to Peter for way over an hour like that and dick pics didn't come up even once. Or even anything sexual. They were just talking about books. The ones they liked, the ones they didn't like, and which ones they had on their endless list of books they wanted to read eventually but never came around to read.

They had to stop when members of the Hale pack came home and they would start reading over Peter's shoulder because they did not have a sense of privacy as Peter put it.

It's your own fault, sitting in the living room like this, Stiles wrote.

He didn't even know if Peter was sitting in the living room but if he were, there were way too many ways to glance at his phone. The Hales' living room was huge and almost none of the couches and chairs had a wall in the back.

They ended their conversation with the promise to talk again soon.

Stiles put the phone aside and rolled to his back. He didn't know what to make out of this, out of Peter. The werewolf had not mentioned making amends again but Stiles just knew that it was still

on his mind. Was he just a charity case to Peter? Was he trying to be friendly because he thought that Stiles was lonely? But that didn't explain the chat they just had.

With a huff, Stiles reached for his phone again and scrolled through their messages. They sounded genuine.

He was an overthinker by nature he knew that but he also knew that he wasn't good at this. Whatever this was they were doing. Was it flirting? Was Peter flirting with him? Was Stiles flirting with Peter? He didn't know.

It would be easier if this was just about sex. He knew how to do that. Sex was going to the right place, a simple question of yes or no and they were good to go. In desperate times he'd even made some money that way but it was something completely different with Peter.

Earlier, Peter had said that he wanted to know everything about Stiles and Stiles had to admit that it was the same for him. They had just talked about books for over an hour.

Stiles let out a groan, this wasn't going anywhere. And he was still not in the mood for reading. He wasn't in the mood for anything so he got up and stripped out of most of his clothes, no need to get them all wet, then he locked his cabin and dove into the lake.

Stiles let himself sink to the bottom. Here he didn't have to think. He just needed to be careful, he tended to lose track of time and he wanted to have dinner with John tomorrow. And maybe talk to Peter some more.

"Stiles?" Derek asked. Down here he didn't have a form, not really. Nothing down here had, not even Stiles. Stiles was just floating in the water with Derek's presence surrounding him. So Derek's voice was coming from everywhere but mostly it was in Stiles' mind.

"I'm fine," Stiles answered the same way. Derek was everywhere, he was a comforting blanket Stiles could wrap around himself. A very wet blanket but that didn't matter. With Derek Stiles didn't feel the cold. Here he didn't get tired or hungry or any of that. He didn't even need to breathe.

"Something is bothering you," Derek stated. After all these years he was good at reading Stiles.

"Peter." Stiles let out a sigh. "I just don't know what to do with him."

"You don't have to do anything," Derek reminded him and Stiles let himself sink deeper into his presence. It was tempting to just surrender to that and maybe wake up in a decade or two.

"I'm not going to miss dinner with John tomorrow," Stiles emphasized but his mind was drifting in the water.

"Do you want me to take care of the werewolf?" Derek asked quietly. He didn't like killing but sometimes he had no other choice. When people were coming to the lake, when they were staying for too long or swam out too far, then Derek didn't have a choice. It was his nature and he had to follow his instincts. Thanks to John, there hadn't been a drowning in years but the next poor soul going into the water was doomed. Derek wouldn't be able to hold back, not after years without drowning someone.

But what he was offering now had nothing to do with that. This was Derek offering to kill Peter Hale out of his own free will. Just because he wanted to help Stiles.

"No," Stiles said firmly. "I don't want you to take care of him." After a second he added: "I kind of like him."

Derek accepted it like he accepted everything surface related.

Stiles didn't have let himself sink into Derek this deep in quite a while and when he came up again, he had to hurry to be on time for dinner with John.

He hurried back to the cabin to get dressed but first, he checked his phone in case John had to cancel because he had to take over a shift or something like that. There was nothing from John but Stiles found two messages from Peter waiting for him. The first he'd sent this morning, a comment on the last book Stiles had mentioned in an obvious attempted to get the conversation going again and the second one just half an hour old, asking if he was ignoring him on purpose.

Chapter 16

Peter growled after Cora for her comment about his scent but she was already heading up the stairs to do something about her own scent, no doubt.

Peter sniffed his armpit to check if things were as obvious with him as Cora had claimed. He did catch a faint whiff of Stiles on him and he couldn't deny the mixed feelings he had about him. Arousal was one of them. So a little freshening up wouldn't hurt.

While upstairs the shower started, Peter gave himself a quick once over in the smaller bathroom downstairs.

He wondered when or if Cora would introduce her girlfriend and how Talia would react to that. She was pretty open-minded and never had a problem with Peter being bi. Not that he had ever made a big deal out of that but he had brought home a boyfriend now and then when he'd been younger. Then he'd met Olivia and other people had been forgotten.

It had been eight years since Olivia had died but thinking about her stirred up the grief again. He probably would never really be over it and he'd meant it when he'd said that he still loved her but it wasn't a thing constantly on his mind any longer. But then there were moments like this, when Olivia had come up again or something reminded him of her, a scent, a song, and the grief felt fresh like on the first day.

Peter sat down on one of the couches, without most of the pack home, the living room felt empty and way too huge, and let his head fall back to rest on the back of the couch.

He just needed a moment. Then he would go upstairs and look at that video Bob had given him earlier. And he should start asking questions about new people in town but he put that off for later.

He was just about to get up when his phone buzzed with a new message.

Stiles. Looked like he had gotten his things back.

They texted a bit back and forth, just the usual banter and Peter just knew that he'd railed him up with answering Stiles' question. It was easy fun.

Not that he was serious with his answer. Maybe a little serious.

Then Stiles brought up dick pics and that did not help to get the images out of his head. Their little chat came to a lull but Peter didn't want it to end on dick pics.

So he asked about the book Stiles was reading. It was the first thing coming to mind but it turned out to be the right thing. Peter had only made the mistake of doing this in the living room. Boyd and Isaac were the firsts to come home, followed by Deborah who had picked up Emily. The little girl was instantly zooming in on Peter, asking him if he was busy.

Peter would have liked to keep his conversation with Stiles going but there were too many people around, the house was becoming louder, so he ended their little chat with the promise to talk again soon.

Cora did not mention Stiles but she was constantly throwing worried glances at Peter as if she expected him to out her right here in the middle of the pack. Which he didn't, of course. He might be a mean bastard sometimes but outing someone like that was just wrong. He hoped Cora knew

that.

After dinner, Peter excused himself and retreated to his room. Stiles hadn't sent another message which was good because Peter had work to do and couldn't use the distraction.

He watched the video of the two guys at the gun shop several times. He didn't know these men which was too bad, it would have made things easier. With no audio, Peter had only what Bob had told him to go on with. That they were heading towards Beacon Hills and that they had mentioned wolfsbane and silver. And that they had been speaking French.

Peter extracted some good pictures of their faces, at least Bob had a decent camera and the faces weren't just pixely blobs, but there wasn't much else he could do. He would have loved to get a license plate but Bob only had cameras on the inside and even if the angle gave him a glimpse out of the window, it hadn't caught the hunters' car. That would have been too easy, Peter guessed.

However, he had two faces to look out for and first thing tomorrow, he would talk to a few people. Maybe somebody had seen something. New people in town were usually easy to spot, Beacon Hills was not that big and hunters tended to stand out.

Peter glanced at the time. Not too late to go out, he decided.

There were a few bars that would fit this kind of clientele, it couldn't hurt to check. He would check the hotels and motels around town tomorrow.

The first bar he hit was popular with truckers, it was the closest to the interstate. Peter scanned the room when he entered but at first glance, nobody stood out. Men in worn jeans and trucker caps were all around but nothing that screamed hunter at him. Peter made his way over to the bar where he gave the bartender a nod and got served a beer without asking. Peter accepted his beer and kept his eyes on that and the bar in front of him, he didn't need to look around like a fool to get a feeling for the other patrons. A bit down the bar were a man and a woman, slowly working their way up into an argument. Three men at a table telling war stories from the road. Two women in the corner, quietly drinking their beer. Some bikers at the pool tables.

Peter drank his beer slowly with his ears open but nothing was catching his attention. The couple at the other end of the bar, they were a couple, going on ten years, there was no way Peter could have missed that, was now close to yelling at each other. What the argument was about, Peter still had no clue, though.

"Anything else I can bring you?" The bartender came over when Peter was nearing the end of his beer.

"Seen any new faces around?" Peter asked. He'd made a point of being good friends with the bartenders in town, it did come in handy from time to time.

"Just the usual." He took Peter's by now empty glass. "Truckers and bikers passing through. Nobody who sticks around."

Peter ordered a shot, it would look weird if he was sitting here without a drink, but for now, he didn't touch it. He put his elbow on the bar and was now facing the couple. They had been at the yelling stage a second ago and Peter had fully expected that glasses would be flying by now or at least one of them storming out but they had done a complete one-eighty and were now taking shots together.

"What's with them?" Peter asked.

"They come here a few times a month," the bartender answered with an amused look at them. "They're fighting as if she's going to kick him out tonight and filing for divorce tomorrow but in the end, they're just getting drunk together. Don't ask me." He shook his head. "The make up sex must be great or something."

Peter watched them for a moment longer but they seemed to have calmed down and were just nursing their drinks now.

Shaking his head, Peter reached for his drink. He knocked it back, paid with a generous tip and then he left the bar.

He checked out two more bars but no luck. He did meet some interesting people and got one offer for a fun night, which he declined, but in the end, Peter came home empty-handed.

In the morning, he shot Stiles a message in hope to get their conversation going again. The house was empty and he wouldn't get interrupted but the little checkmark didn't turn blue, meaning Stiles hadn't even read his message.

So Peter grabbed his jacket and keys and left to ask around at some motels if somebody had seen the two men.

Nobody had.

Frustrated Peter came home around noon.

"What's going on?" Pamela peeked around the corner when he slammed the door. She had one look at him and he could almost see when motherly instincts kicked in. Before he knew it he was sitting at the kitchen table and she was handing him a sandwich.

"I was about to have lunch anyway." She quickly fixed one for herself as well and then they were eating quietly. "Do you have time? I need a second pair of strong hands."

And just like that Peter spent the afternoon, helping Pamela in the garden. At least here he got somewhere, he could see the results of his hard work. And it kept his mind from thinking too much.

"Feeling better?" Pamela asked when they were finishing up. It was almost dinner time and most of the pack was home already.

"Yeah, thanks." He hadn't even told her about his frustrating search for these men, sprinkled with a random thought about Stiles now and then. Peter was used to the first, most of the time he had to do a lot of footwork to get some answers and sometimes it just didn't work out, it happens. What was really getting under his skin, though, was Stiles. Who still hadn't even read his message from earlier. Was he ignoring him on purpose?

Peter asked him just that before he went to wash up and join the others for dinner.

When Peter checked his phone after dinner, he did have a new message from Stiles.

Sorry, spent the day under and now I'm late for dinner with John. Talk later

Peter read the message again. The second part he understood. John had told him himself that Stiles would have dinner with him tonight but the first part Peter didn't get. Under? Under what? In any other case, his mind would jump to things like depression but with Stiles, he had the suspicion that he meant it quite literally, that he had spent the day under the surface of the lake.

Peter had seen how easily Stiles had dived into the lake and hadn't come up again. What didn't sit right with Peter was the fact that Derek had ordered him to come with him. He'd come out of the lake to stop Stiles from talking to Peter and it had only taken one word from Derek and Stiles had followed him back into the lake.

However, Stiles hadn't seemed to be bothered by that, he'd looked as if he was used to it.

… spent the day under …

Peter couldn't get that bit out of his mind. Stiles' nature had been constantly on the back of his mind, he'd never really forgotten about it but for a while, he'd been able to kind of ignore it. And now it looked like Stiles had spent the whole day, most likely the night before as well, at the bottom of the lake.

What is it like, down there? Peter wrote but hesitated to send the message. In the end, curiosity won and he did hit send. Like expected Stiles didn't answer right away, he was most likely in the middle of having dinner with the sheriff.

Peter followed the rest of the pack to the living room. Someone had switched on the TV but nobody was watching. Boyd and Erica were quietly talking to each other. Pamela and Deborah had teamed up and were now giving Christina pregnancy tips, somebody would have to rescue her some time soon. There was homework being done and Walter was reading a book. Everybody was doing their own thing but they were all enjoying the company of the pack.

Things became quieter when a show came on most of them were interested in. Peter was not most but he didn't mind either and for a while, he just enjoyed being surrounded by his pack.

Emily was the first who had to go to bed, followed a little later by the teenagers. Peter doubted that those would be sleeping any time soon but they retreated to their rooms for the night. And then, one by one, the rest of the pack said their goodnights until it was just him and Talia.

The phone in his pocket had stayed quiet the whole evening and Peter had checked from time to time if he'd missed a message but no such luck.

"What's on your mind?" Talia asked. They were sitting in chairs with their legs stretched out, just enjoying the quiet that had fallen over the house.

Peter pondered his options for a moment. He had nothing on those hunters, it was way too early to bother her with that, but his mind was more on Stiles anyway. They, the Hales, had done this to him, it was their fault that Stiles had to spend whole days *under.* And Peter had no idea how to make it right.

"I told you about the monster living out in the lake," Peter started, maybe it was time for a second opinion. "Turned out that's not the only thing living out there. Well, not a thing more a someone."

Chapter 17

First, Peter brought Talia up to date with what he knew about Derek. He left out the part where Derek had almost drowned him but he did mention that he could come through the pipes.

"You think he's a threat?" Talia asked the question Peter had been pondering for a while now.

However, Derek had come to him to threaten him when he could have just killed him and be done with it. Plus, Stiles had mentioned that Derek didn't like to kill. Even the sheriff didn't seem particularly worried about the lake monster in his town but Peter had to admit that since the sheriff was keeping an eye on the lake, nobody had died out there.

"No." He shook his head. "He's not a threat. At least not until provoked."

"Okay." She took his word for that. "So what about that other someone?"

Peter told her about the deal the alpha back then had with Derek and how he'd cheated his way out of it. That Stiles now was bound to stay with Derek. Peter just gave her the cliff-notes, no need to go into detail here. He didn't want to betray Stiles by gossiping about him but Talia needed to know at least the basics.

When he'd finished, she sat there in stunned silence for a moment, trying to comprehend the new information.

"Oh and by the way, the sheriff knows about us," Peter added for good measure.

"Sheriff Stilinski?" That threw her off. Peter couldn't blame her. He had thought that their secret was well kept and that he knew everybody around here who knew about them but the sheriff had completely slipped his radar. If he hadn't outed himself, Peter would have never guessed.

"The very same," Peter said. "He's pretending to be Stiles' uncle, pretty sure Stiles told him about us. Years ago."

The sheriff had known about werewolves for years and they had been none the wiser. Peter didn't like that at all but on the other hand, he had to give the sheriff kudos for taking it in stride. "As long as we're not breaking the law, he won't do anything."

"Why didn't we know about all this?" Talia asked. "How can this Stiles live out there for decades without us noticing? You say he's in town quite frequently."

"We never had a reason to have a closer look," Peter offered but he had been asking himself the same question. It was his job to know things like this. "And we don't go there, remember?"

She nodded to that and Peter was pretty sure that that rule would be enforced more firmly again.

"So this Stiles." She came to the point Peter wanted to talk about. "Is there something we can do?"

"I don't know how," Peter admitted. "Even if we free him somehow, I doubt Derek is just going to ignore such a breach of contract. He's played along and has accepted Stiles instead of what he's been promised but cheating him out of that?" He shook his head. "Things would become bloody." He had no doubt about that.

"So what can we do? We can't just leave him like that."

"He told me to do just that. To let things be." Peter sighed. "He has my number, we've been talking."

Talia threw him a glance but didn't comment on it.

"I want to meet him," she decided.

"I doubt that he wants to meet you. He's not particularly fond of the Hale family." Peter made a face, remembering how gleeful Stiles had been when he'd thought that Peter had killed a Hale. "For obvious reasons."

"What do you suggest?"

"Keep things like they are for now." Peter didn't like it but he had no other idea. "I still don't know what Derek is, I might be able to say more once I know. Until then? I'm going to stay in contact with Stiles."

"You're using him."

"No." That word came out sharper than intended. "I like him and I want to help him."

"You don't like people. And you don't want to help people," Talia reminded him. "You think about the safety of the pack first, always. That's the reason why you're my left hand."

"Stiles is different," he said and planted his feet firmly on the floor. "I'm going to check the doors and then I'll turn in." He stood and walked out of the room. He couldn't remember the last time he hadn't been the last to turn in but the conversation had been heading in a direction he didn't want right now. He felt Talia's eyes on his back but ignored them.

He made a quick round to make sure that everything was locked before he retreated to his bedroom.

It was still early, at least for him, so he got comfortable on the bed and took his phone out. Stiles had read his message but he still hadn't answered his question about what it was like to be under. Randomly *Under the Sea* popped into his head but he doubted that this was as colorful and happy as in the movie.

He was just about to put the phone aside, it was late and he doubted that Stiles would answer at this time of the night but then he saw that Stiles was typing.

Peaceful, came the answer. *Nothing matters down there.*

Do you like it?

Depends. It's a nice retreat but I do like being upside.

Hence the cabin, Peter thought. And Stiles did have contacts in town. Which reminded him …

Did you enjoy dinner with your uncle?

He was pouting all the way through dinner. I forced him to have salad

You're cruel

He deserved it for telling you that he knows about you. Not you you but you know

Peter did know and he appreciated that Stiles did not use the word *werewolf* in a written conversation. Who knew who might read it.

He was pouting so badly that I caved and we had pasta later. Totally forgot the time over that. Again

Peter sensed more behind those words but before he could type out the question, Stiles had sent him another message.

So about that book ...

Peter got more comfortable on the bed.

They started with books, picking things up right where they had left them yesterday but they moved on to other things eventually. If Peter had seen the latest Spiderman? To which Peter had to admit that he'd seen a few of the Marvel movies but that he wasn't particularly fond of Spiderman. To which Stiles broke into a rant about how awesome Tom Holland was, followed by a rant about how it was not acceptable that Peter wasn't up to date with the Marvel Franchise.

We need to watch them

All of them

I have a spreadsheet of the right order to watch them

With all the tie-ins

But we can keep those for later

The last few messages came in as rapidly fired shots.

Who says that I want to watch them? Peter asked.

Nobody's asking you. Those movies are our culture

If you say so, Peter couldn't help but tease.

I do

There was a pause where the dots were indicating that Stiles was typing but there were long pauses as if he was writing and deleting something. Peter waited patiently for him to make up his mind.

When are you free? Was the message Stiles finally sent out.

Is this a date? Peter asked, partly to mess with him but partly because he wanted to know where they stood.

No, Stiles answered instantly but after a second another message came in: *Unless you want it to be*

Peter laughed at that.

It's a date, then

You do know that there are 23 movies, right? Stiles reminded him. Not that Peter had known the exact number just that there were a lot of these movies. *That's 23 dates, 12 if we do double features*

Let's start with one, Peter tried to slow him down.

And just like that Peter had a date.

They would hash out the details later because they would not have a movie night at the Hale house, both of them were set on that, and Stiles didn't want to watch the movies on the little screen of his laptop in his cabin. That would have been cozy but camping out on the floor in the pile of blankets Stiles called a bed was not Peter's idea of a date. He felt a tad too old for that.

Stiles suggested the sheriff's place, he was pulling nightshifts a lot lately and he did have a nice big TV. Stiles just had to ask him when it would work out with his schedule. Peter was not sure what to think about that but it was the easiest option. He didn't want to rent a room for a night because that would implicate things and he didn't know what Stiles would say to that. So the sheriff's place it was.

It was way after midnight when they called it a night and Peter put away his phone. Talia had gone to bed a while ago so the house was quiet again. Before Peter got ready for bed, he went downstairs again and stepped outside for a moment. He hadn't done that earlier and it felt wrong to go to bed without his last round around the house. Everything was quiet outside and with a good feeling, Peter locked up and went to bed.

He wasn't constantly texting with Stiles, there were long stretches of time where Stiles didn't read his messages and vice versa, Peter had things to do as well, but they were talking frequently now. For their date, they had set their minds on the weekend because weekends were for dates at least according to Stiles even if neither of them had to get up early over the week.

Besides, Peter had other things on his mind. There was no sign of those hunters but Peter did check in with most of his contacts just to stay in the loop.

Then he was still trying to figure out what Derek was. That had become kind of an obsession to him because once he knew what Derek was he might be able to help Stiles. Not that Stiles had asked for his help, quite the opposite. Stiles had explicitly told him to drop it but that was the one thing Peter couldn't do. He needed to know. If that knowledge would help him in the long run and if he would use it in some way he didn't know but he wanted to have it. Just in case.

Stiles had said that Derek might have come to America with the Vikings or German settlers so that narrowed it down but not by much. There were a lot of European water spirits. A lot of them quite similar but every country had its own version and even in the same country, those could differ wildly from region to region. Even if Peter had a name, it was quite possible that he wouldn't get the little differences in meaning and that this version of the creature would not play by the rules he thought it would. It was frustrating. But it kept his mind busy.

Peter drove Emily to her guitar lesson on Friday and stopped by the library as usual until it was time to pick her up again. He had kind of hoped to see Stiles there as well but no such luck. So he just browsed the shelves, picked a few books at random and was out of the library before Denise spotted him. He was not in the mood for gossip right now.

Cora was avoiding him but he caught her looking at him as if she was trying to figure something out or as if she was working up the courage to ask him something but every time he looked back at her, she ducked her head and said nothing. She would come around on her own time, Peter decided and didn't push.

Then it was Saturday and he had a date with Stiles. Peter did not tell his family where he was going when he left the house before dinner but they were used to him coming and going as he pleased so

nobody questioned it.

On his way over to the sheriff's place, he stopped at the store. Peter didn't want to show up empty-handed. He'd thought about wine, the classic date gift but Stiles didn't even look old enough to have wine and it wouldn't fit the kind of movie they intended to watch. Peter passed on the chocolate as well, that wasn't Stiles either.

He left the store with Twizzlers and lollipops.

This was going to be the death of him, Peter just knew but it looked like he was that kind of masochistic.

Chapter 18

Stiles was outraged when he read that Peter hadn't seen most of the Marvel movies.

Stiles had gone to the movies every time a new one had come out and he had been back multiple times. Those were his comfort movies and he didn't grow tired of watching them over and over again. Okay, there were plot holes and that time travel thing had just been bullshit but all in all, he loved them and he had thoughts about them. He might have spent whole days on the internet, discussing meta and reading fanfiction. Because Stucky. Among others. He was a multi-shipper when it came to Marvel.

But better start light with Peter. So the plan was to just watch Captain America for their first date. Because they were going to have a date.

Which had totally not been his intention. Stiles just wanted to fill this gap in education for Peter because how could he be alive today and have not seen them? Stiles wasn't sure if he himself counted as alive and he did spend quite a lot of his time at the bottom of the lake which kind of equaled living under a rock and still he'd seen all of the movies.

When Peter had asked if they were talking about a date here, Stiles had dropped his phone, totally blindsided by that idea. But apparently, Peter was talking about a date here.

So the next morning Stiles checked in with John if he could borrow his house for the weekend.

John had questions, of course he had. It had been a while since Stiles had a friend over, years actually, he was not good at making friends and he never managed to keep a friendship alive for long. His friendship with John was the longest relationship he ever had, not counting Derek, and most of the time that was enough.

Most people saw him as a teenager so his friends had been mostly teenagers but he didn't have anything in common with them. Even if they had the same interests, they were not on the same maturity level and it showed. But being friends with adults was not an option either since they didn't see him as an adult which made the whole situation creepy as fuck. John was the only exception.

And now there was Peter. Peter knew that he wasn't just a teenager and he didn't treat him as such. Stiles didn't know where this was heading but he was willing to give it a try. At least he had to educate Peter on Marvel.

"But Peter Hale?" John asked again but Stiles could already see the defeat in his posture. Not that John would try to forbid it. He was not Stiles' uncle and Stiles was not a teenager. And even if they had a weird kind of father-son relationship going on, John always treated him like an adult who could do whatever the hell he wanted. As long as he didn't get in trouble with the law.

On Saturday, Stiles left his cabin as late as he dared and headed over to John's place.

John had already left for work but he had set out some things on the kitchen counter. Glasses and bowls. Bags of chips and popcorn, the latter coming with a note telling Stiles that he should leave that to Peter.

Stiles snorted at that and crumbled the note in his hand. He could make popcorn just fine. How hard could it be?

There were enough stories cruising the internet about fire alarms in dorms because some drunk idiot had not been capable of operating a microwave at three in the morning but Stiles was not one of them.

John had also left money on the counter for the pizza they would order and when Stiles opened the fridge he found several bottles of juice and coke just waiting for him. There was even beer. Stiles chuckled at that. The sheriff providing a minor with beer for a date with a man twice his age. At least that's what it must look like to an outsider. Stiles closed the fridge and headed over to the living room to check if everything was ready there as well. Peter would be here any minute and by now Stiles was a twitching mess.

This was a date. Holy fuck, this was a date.

Stiles sprinted up the stairs to check his room. He used it for storage most of the time but there was a bed in there and for some reason he'd felt the need to clean up the other day. John had given him a look but he'd not been complaining that Stiles was tidying up for once.

Stiles doubted that they would come up here, they wanted to watch a movie nothing else but he felt better knowing that they could. There were even fresh sheets on the bed.

Then Stiles was pacing the living room until the doorbell rang.

"Your neighbors really shouldn't let their dog run free," Peter said when Stiles opened the door.

Stiles blinked at him.

"Let me guess, Buttons doesn't like you either." Stiles broke into a wide grin. "It's not just me."

But then he hurried to drag Peter inside before that hell beast could show up again. It was nowhere in sight but that didn't mean anything.

"Dogs usually have a problem with us." Peter closed the door. "But they tend to run with their tails between their legs." He flashed his eyes at Stiles, electric blue sparkling up for just a second.

"I wish I had those," Stiles muttered. He didn't want to become a werewolf, just no, but having some defense against that dog would be nice. One day he would just kick that little fucker across the lawn, he just knew.

Peter studied him for a moment, filing away the fact that the dog reacted badly to Stiles but nobody else, no doubt, but then he raised the bag he was carrying.

"I brought some snacks."

Stiles ripped the bag out of his hand to have a look inside and he felt his knees go weak when he recognized the package.

"I think I love you."

Stiles ripped open the Twizzlers right then and there and with the candy hanging out of his mouth, he led Peter farther into the house.

At first, it was awkward, they were sitting on the couch, Stiles munching away on his Twizzlers and neither of them knew what to do or say.

"I'll get the popcorn going," Stiles announced to which Peter offered to help but Stiles waved him

off.

He did almost set the microwave on fire, though.

Only Peter's good nose saved them but the package of popcorn was ruined.

"Dammit." Stiles glared at the smoldering remains in the sink. "John is going to kill me."

"I doubt that he's going to kill you over some popcorn."

Stiles hung his head and fished the note out of the bin.

"Looks like he knows you." Peter chuckled when he read it.

Stiles grumbled to that.

They did have more than enough snacks even without the popcorn and they would have pizza later so Stiles just soaked the ruined package in water and threw it out.

"Okay, we have a movie to watch." Like a man on a mission, he grabbed the chips and a bottle of coke and marched over to the living room.

Watching the movie with Peter was fun. Captain America was one of the few Peter had seen before but it had been years ago and he admitted that he didn't recall much. He didn't seem to mind the comments Stiles threw in here and there, though.

They paused the movie half-way in to order their pizza. Stiles used the chance to quiz Peter on what he'd liked so far and what he thought would happen next. His guesses were wildly off and Stiles had the suspicion that Peter was messing with him here but then their pizza arrived and they started the movie again.

"I liked it," Peter admitted when the credits were rolling. He reached for the remote to end the movie but Stiles slapped his hand.

"First rule of Marvel movies." He raised a finger to emphasize this part. "There's always an after-credits scene. And you always watch the full credits, no skipping to the scene."

"I think you made up the second part."

"I sat through endless minutes of credits to watch those scenes in the theater, you have to do the same." He put the remote out of reach just in case. "Besides the music's good."

Stiles was not one to sit in silence for long so naturally, he started to talk again. He tried his best to keep his rambling spoiler-free but he wanted to know what Peter thought of this or that scene and if he'd noticed that one detail Stiles had only spotted on his third run. Stiles was way ahead of him, harboring years of knowledge not only from the other movies but from endless meta discussions on the internet, but he got the impression that that didn't matter to Peter. He was not as enthusiastic as Stiles but he had his opinions and he didn't seem to mind Stiles' rambling.

When Stiles checked the time it was almost midnight.

"Shit! When did it get this late?" He was not running out of time just yet, he was not Cinderella who had to be home by midnight, but he didn't have all night either. He just hadn't thought that he would spend most of his time, rambling about the movie. Thinking about it, he should have known.

"If it's getting too late for you I can leave," Peter offered.

"No, no." Stile held him back. "Please stay. It's just ..."

"Just what?" Peter asked gently. He put the bowl of chips aside he'd been hogging for a while now.

Stiles let out a sigh, he didn't want to dampen the mood with silly stuff like this, they were having a good time here.

"I can't stay away from Derek for too long," he finally said with another glance at the clock, calculating.

"Do you have to leave?" Peter asked and Stiles wished that he knew what was going on in his head right now.

"No, I still have at least two hours, maybe a little more. It's not an exact science." He slumped back into the couch with his arms crossed over his chest. There, he'd killed the mood.

"What happens if you're not back in time?" Peter asked but he was not just gathering information. The way he was looking at Stiles ... it was not pity, Stiles would have kicked him out if he'd looked at him in pity, but it wasn't anything he could place either.

"I'm not going to die if that's what you think." Stiles reached for a fresh lollipop. The Twizzlers were long gone and this was his third lollipop but he needed something to keep his hands busy. And his mouth. It helped him concentrate to have something to chew on.

"That's good to know," Peter said when Stiles failed to elaborate farther. He was watching with interest when Stiles peeled off the wrapper and just because, Stiles licked the lollipop to wet it properly before he rolled it between his lips. Peter followed every move with his eyes.

Stiles grinned with the candy between his lips.

"If I'm not back in time, Derek is coming to get me," Stiles explained. "That's not a bad thing but this is supposed to be a date and yeah." He gestured with the lollipop to indicate that Derek showing up on his date was kind of like John coming home early. Even if they were just sitting here, talking about the movie, it would be just wrong.

"Would he be mad?" Peter asked.

"Worried that he might be mad at you?"

"I don't want you to get in trouble," Peter answered and visibly tore his eyes away from what Stiles was doing with the lollipop.

"I won't," Stiles assured him. "Usually I'm good at being home in time but lately he had to come and get me twice. He's not mad at me, quite the opposite, he would love to let me roam more freely. But he can't, it's one of the things he can't help." Stiles straightened up. "Let's not talk about that. We were having fun, let's get back to that."

But with that interruption, he was no longer in the mood to talk about the movie and his attempt to get the conversation going again was half-hearted at best. Maybe they should just call it a night.

They still had twenty-two movies to watch, Peter would not get out of that. They would watch them all.

However, Stiles didn't want their date to end just yet. So maybe …

He glanced over to Peter and caught him staring at the lollipop in his mouth again.

Stiles swirled his tongue around the bulb of the candy.

"Admit it, you were buying these in hope for a show."

"It was more that I knew I would regret it later," Peter said, his eyes hungry now. "I was right."

"I have a very talented tongue." Stiles curled it around the candy to demonstrate what he meant.

"I can see that." Peter scooted closer. "And you're a tease."

"What gave it away?"

Peter brought their lips together with the lollipop still caught between them.

Chapter 19

Peter enjoyed the movie but he enjoyed the company more. Stiles loved these movies, that showed, but his comments and the way he talked about it afterward, he was making some compelling points. Peter didn't know which parts Stiles had come up with himself and what he'd learned on the internet but he had a way to talk about it that made it fun, listening to him.

The way Stiles strung together his arguments told of a sharp mind, Peter liked that. There was nothing worse than somebody who couldn't stand their ground in an argument.

Then there was the candy. Peter had been cursing himself when he'd bought it and he had not been wrong. The Twizzlers hanging out of the corner of Stiles' mouth had been one thing but since he'd switched to lollipops Peter couldn't help but watch in awe what he was doing to them. He wasn't sure if he should envy the lollipop or feel sorry for it, some of the things Stiles was doing to it should be illegal, but Peter couldn't help it and watched in morbid fascination. He even had to discreetly adjust himself in his pants, something that hadn't happened in quite a while. For years his own hand had been enough and he hadn't really looked at other people in that way but he was looking at Stiles now.

And that bastard knew exactly what he was doing to Peter.

In the end, Peter just leaned in and brought their lips together. There was still Stiles' latest lollipop victim between them. It tasted way too sugary and the chemicals were dominating everything, he wasn't able to taste anything beyond that but at the moment Peter didn't care. He cupped Stiles' head to hold him close, not that Stiles was trying to get away from him. Quite the opposite, Stiles was kissing right back, his tongue sneaking around the bulb of the candy to trace along Peter's lips.

When they parted, Stiles grinned around the candy, his lips shiny with sugary saliva. Peter plucked the lollipop out of his mouth and dove back in for a real kiss. Stiles met him willingly, his tongue darting out, brushing against his. Damn, it had been way too long since he'd had this.

"Do you want to know what else I can do with my tongue?" Stiles asked and nipped at his bottom lip. His hand fell to Peter's hip, fingertips tracing along the waistband of his jeans.

"Absolutely."

That was all the encouragement Stiles needed, he pushed Peter back into a half-lying position and then he was working on getting him out of his pants.

Peter had a short lucid moment during which he reminded himself that they were doing this on the sheriff's couch and that they were on a strict time limit before Derek would show up to collect Stiles but then Stiles' breath ghosted over his shaft and Peter just closed his eyes.

Stiles was talented with his tongue. Peter didn't keep his eyes closed for long, it would be a shame to not watch this, and then he was just mesmerized but the sight of Stiles' lips stretched around him. The swirl around the head of his by now fully erect penis coaxed the first moan out of him but the press of that tongue against the underside of his shaft when Stiles took him deep turned the moan into a low growl.

Peter spilled his release in an embarrassingly short amount of time but at least he managed to give Stiles a warning to back off before he shot hot jets of come all over Stiles' face. Stiles jacked him through the waves of his orgasm before he sat back with a satisfied smile on his face.

"Told you." With a tissue Stiles cleaned himself up which was a shame, the more animalistic part of Peter would have liked for his come to stay on Stiles' face. Or maybe he could have licked it off himself but that might have been a bit too much for a first date. Spent Peter let his head fall back, his body was still tingling all over from what Stiles had done down there.

"Did I break you?" Stiles teased. He was palming himself through his jeans but didn't seem in a hurry to get some attention there.

"Let me." Peter pushed himself back up. He took a moment to righten his pants but then he had Stiles lying under him. Bracing his arms next to Stiles' head, he looked down on him.

"I still want to know what you look like when you come," Peter reminded him and brought their lips back together for a kiss. The sugary chemicals from the lollipop were still there but now Peter tasted himself on Stiles' tongue, the heady taste of his precome and traces of come. That was way better. He licked the taste right out of Stiles' mouth. When he came up again to look him in the eye, Peter knew that his were showing a hint of blue. Stiles didn't flinch, he stayed open and relaxed, just lying there and waiting for what Peter would do next.

"What do you want?" Peter asked. He felt his gums itching with the prick of teeth just waiting to break through.

Instead of an answer Stiles closed his hand around Peter's right wrist and brought his hand into their line of view. Peter hadn't extended his claws fully, he was not a horny teenager, but his fingers were not humanly blunt either.

"I've never done it with a werewolf." Stiles studied his hand with hunger in his eyes. "Jerk me off like this?"

Peter had to swallow at that. Normally he had himself better under control, he had slept with human partners without sprouting fangs and claws but something about Stiles brought out his animalistic side. Stiles seemed to like it, though.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Peter promised because those claws were sharp, they could easily slice through flesh, they both knew that. They had met over a body Peter had worked over with these claws and still Stiles tugged at his hand to bring it down between them to where he wanted it.

Peter scooted down until he was kneeling over Stiles' outstretched legs. To make sure that this was really okay, he locked eyes with Stiles who had come up to his elbows to watch the show which was encouragement enough for Peter. With a clawed hand, he reached for Stiles' fly.

Since Stiles wanted his claws, his breath had hitched and his heart had sped up at the sight of them alone, Peter made sure to let him feel them. He ran a pointed fingertip along his shaft from root to tip where he let it dip into the slit before he formed a cage and ran all five claws up his length at once.

Stiles made a strangled noise, eyes glued to where his most vulnerable part was trapped in Peter's deadly hand. Peter did the same again, this time with a little more pressure, leaving angry red lines on the upstroke. The noises Stiles were making now were borderline to pained and Peter couldn't get enough of it. So he did it once more just to hear those noises again but then he took pity on Stiles and closed his hand around him, palm firmly against his flesh and claws carefully averted. Peter jacked him off with quick strokes but he threw in the prick of a claw here and there just to keep Stiles on his toes.

"Peter!" Stiles threw his head back, his body tense, he was close now. Peter placed his other hand

on Stiles' lower abdomen, claws pricking the soft skin there. Just a little more force and he would gut him right open. Stiles came with a strangled cry, bucking wildly under Peter and he had to hurry to retract his claws to not hurt Stiles by accident.

Stiles fell back, chest heaving.

"Damn that was good."

"For a guy who hates werewolves, you get off by these …" He held up his clawed hand. "Suspiciously quick."

"Fuck you," Stiles muttered and threw an arm over his face.

"We'll get to that another time," Peter said. They had time, they still had twenty-two movies to watch after all and he was looking forward to that.

"Pegged you more for a top," Stiles said with his arm still covering his eyes. "Thought you would go all wild, mounting your partner and all that."

"You were hoping for that," Peter corrected. The last few minutes had given him some interesting insights into Stiles' kinks. And his own. He'd never thought what a mouth could do to him. Or rather the way Stiles was using his.

"But you're right. I do prefer to top," Peter added.

"Wasn't actually thinking that far ahead." Stiles held out his hand. "Give me a tissue."

They cleaned up but neither of them wanted to move just yet so they got comfortable again.

But it was getting late and Peter wasn't sure if he wanted to face Derek again, at least not like this, so after a few minutes, he got up.

"It was a pleasure but I think I should leave now." Peter tilted his head in a little bow.

Stiles nodded in agreement, gaze flickering over to the clock.

"We should do this again," Peter said just in case Stiles doubted that point.

"Dude, we still have twenty-two movies to watch," Stiles reminded him as if Peter could forget that little fact. "But yeah, I'd like to repeat this."

He was fiddling with the hem of his shirt which had come strains on it but Stiles didn't seem to care. Peter stepped closer to bring his mouth to Stiles' ear.

"Next time I'm going to mount you," he promised to which Stiles sucked in a sharp breath. "And I'm going to be shifted."

This close Peter got a face full of the pheromones Stiles was suddenly emitting.

"Not fair, dude, not fair," Stiles muttered but Peter didn't even need his nose to tell how much Stiles liked the idea.

"Good night, Stiles." Peter brushed a chaste kiss on the soft skin behind Stiles' ear before he left.

Peter drove back to the Hale house, humming along to the radio. He hadn't felt this alive in ages. And he was looking forward to their next date.

There were still lights on in the house when Peter parked his car.

"Shit," he cursed under his breath. They had cleaned up with tissues but those were only able to do that much, there was no way that anybody with a wolf's nose would miss what Peter was reeking off. Back at Stiles' he'd liked the way their scents had mingled, how they smelled of each other's semen but now he wished that he'd taken the time for a shower before he'd left. That might have been a weird request but Stiles would have understood. But too late for that now.

Whoever was still up, most likely Talia who was he kidding, must have heard his car, no turning back now.

When Peter entered the house, he wore his scent with pride. He just had awesome sex, nothing to be ashamed of.

"Didn't expect you to be still up," he greeted his sister who was sitting alone in the living room. Looked as if she'd been going through baby pictures, they were all over the table.

"I bet." She wrinkled her nose in disgust. "You could have taken the time for a shower."

"I didn't want a shower." He took a seat not directly next to her.

She took another breath, this time deeper.

"Someone I know?" She asked when she failed to place the scent still lingering on Peter.

"You haven't met." Peter picked up a picture of Laura. She must have been five or six in this one. She was out in the yard, laughing at somebody outside of the picture.

"You haven't been with someone in quite a while," Talia said, sorting through the pictures to not openly stare at him. She was thinking of Olivia, no doubt.

"It was a first date." Peter picked up another one. Cora dressed up as a vampire for Halloween.

"It went well, I take." Now she threw him a knowing smile.

"You sound like mom when she caught me getting home late." It wasn't even that late, he usually was still up this time of the night anyway.

"I'm your big sister," she reminded him. "And your alpha. It's my job to bug you when you come home reeking of sex."

She had a point there.

"So?" She drew out the word.

"So what?"

"Who is it? How did you meet? C'mon, I'm your big sister, I want details."

"Too bad, you're not getting any." He put the pictures back. "I'm going on my round and then I'm going to lock up. Good night, big sister."

She stuck her tongue out to him but he just laughed it off.

The cool air of the night cleared his head and took away some of the scent but he was still in need a shower. When he went to bed that night, he fell asleep with a butterfly feeling in his stomach.

Chapter 20

Talia was determined to find out who Peter had been with. If it had been a one-night stand or if he was serious with somebody. Just like when they had been teenagers. It was almost cute.

However, Peter had to make sure that his phone was locked at all times and that she wasn't reading over his shoulder when he was texting with Stiles. He was texting with lots of other people too but somehow she had a sixth sense for the times he was chatting with Stiles.

Since Stiles couldn't let himself be seen in town when teenagers should be in school, he didn't want to cause trouble for the sheriff, he stayed under most mornings. So when they were texting it was mostly in the afternoon or evening. Slowly Peter was seeing the pattern there even if he still didn't know if Stiles had to go back to the bottom of the lake that often or if he chose to go there.

If he went there on his own free will, what made him go? Stiles had drowned in that lake, why would he go back there willingly? They had been texting for a few days now but so far Stiles had refused to answer questions like that. Sometimes he did offer a piece of information but usually those raised more questions than they answered. Like the fact that Derek would come to bring him back. How long did Stiles have? How would Derek bring him back? Peter had the image of Stiles in mind, kicking and cursing while Derek was just carrying him under his arm down the street. Peter doubted that that was the case, somebody would have noticed and most likely would have called the sheriff. Peter was pretty sure that he would have heard about incidents like that. Not that he knew how often Derek had to come out to get Stiles but according to Stiles it had happened a few times lately.

However, Peter was chatting with Stiles at times when he wasn't alone in the house and thanks to Talia everybody wanted to know who he was talking to. Talia had tried to be discreet when she'd asked around if somebody knew who Peter was seeing but there was a reason he was the left hand and she was the alpha and that was not because she was older. She was good with people and the diplomatic stuff but she was shit at gathering information. Peter would have laughed if her clumsy attempt didn't draw the attention of the whole pack to him. Whenever it became too much, he fled the pack-house.

When Peter wanted to be alone he either just went out into the preserve for a run or he drove into town and hid in the library. When he came in two days in a row, even Denise noticed that something was up.

"You're coming here quite often lately." She cornered him one day.

"It's nice and quiet here," Peter offered with a little smile.

"And at home, it is not." She nodded in understanding. "You have too many people living on top of each other, just saying."

"We like it." Peter shrugged. They were pack. Not everybody lived at the main house but they all needed the closeness, it was a werewolf thing. There was a reason omegas didn't survive on their own. The loneliness drove them insane and most killed themselves before the became completely feral. Werewolves needed their pack.

But sometimes it was nice to be alone for a little while. Especially since the whole pack was after him now.

Thanks, sis, Peter thought. He would bet money that more interesting things would happen before the weekend that would catch Talia's attention but at the moment it felt like everybody was stalking him.

"But some privacy from time to time is also nice," Denise added but then someone demanded her attention and she had to leave.

"Didn't expect you here." Suddenly Stiles spoke up behind him.

Pleasantly surprised Peter turned around but was met with a confused look on Stiles' face.

"It's not Friday. Or is it?" For a moment Stiles didn't seem to be sure. "It's Tuesday, right? I've dinner with John tonight." He nodded as if he needed to convince himself of the date.

"Do you miss time?" Peter wondered.

"Days blur together if I'm not careful," Stiles said which didn't answer anything. "Do you want to grab a coffee?"

Maybe he was just in need of some caffeine, though.

"Sure," Peter agreed easily. It would be just his luck that somebody saw them together but he was willing to risk it. He knew that Talia would have a word with him if she knew that he was seeing Stiles. It was wrong on so many levels. Funny enough, the obvious one was not one of those problems. Stiles was not a teenager, he was old enough to do whatever he wanted to do.

But they were still standing on different sides, the division of the town between Derek and the Hale pack was just the result of something that went way deeper but if Stiles was willing to ignore that, Peter was not going to complain.

They went over to the same coffee shop as last time but today Stiles didn't add more shots of espresso to his drink which Peter took as a good sign.

"Is Talia still on your ass?" Stiles asked when they were sitting with their drinks at a table in the corner. Peter liked a seat from which he could overlook his surroundings and nobody could sneak up on him and it looked like it was the same for Stiles. He'd left the seat with the back to the wall to Peter and had taken the one at the window for himself but had twisted into the corner so that he almost had the wall in his back as well and could look out of the window.

"She's in big sister mode." Peter took a sip from his coffee.

"You could always tell her, you know?" Stiles reached for the straw.

"Where would be the fun in that?" He gave Stiles a feral grin. "I'm her little brother it's in the job description to not tell her things like this."

To not look at Stiles molesting the straw Peter had a look around at the other patrons. The coffee shop wasn't cramped, there were still quite a few tables free, and the guests were all focused on their drinks. For a moment he wondered what they thought when they looked at Stiles and him. They would most likely think that they were father and son, he guessed.

"John is going to pull a double on Thursday." Stiles changed the topic. "You up for the next movie?"

"Only if I can shower at your place afterward," Peter agreed. "At least if we …" He made a vague

gesture to which Stiles blushed and almost knocked over his drink. It was adorable.

"Sure thing," Stiles said, trying for casually. He went back to attacking his straw but his heart was beating rapidly and the wave of pheromones coming from him gave him away.

Stiles was now looking out of the window, anywhere that wasn't Peter, he guessed, but then he spotted something outside.

"Is that Cora?" He asked.

Peter followed his line of sight and sure thing, that was his niece walking past the window. In the other direction with her back to them and she would have never spotted them but Stiles just had to blurt out that question, hadn't he? Because Cora had most certainly heard him.

She stopped in her tracks and was now looking around to identify who had just called her name. Peter would have liked to melt into the wall but even if she might not see him, with this angle he might be lucky, Stiles' was basically sitting in the window, there was no way that she would miss him.

Sure enough, her wandering gaze settled on Stiles.

Stiles waved at her.

A second later she stormed into the coffee shop.

"Stiles?" She asked but then her eyes narrowed down on Peter. "What are you doing here?"

"Having a coffee." He lifted his cup.

She rolled her eyes at him and took one of the free chairs. She opened her mouth to say something but was interrupted by Stiles who loudly sucked the remains of his drink through the straw. How anything even went through the chewed and twisted plastic was beyond Peter but for sure it made it noisier.

"I should go now." For good measure, Stiles licked the straw clean before he declared his drink finished. "Thanks for the coffee. We'll text."

He stood and for a moment he was fiddling with his hands as if he wanted to say more but then he turned on his heel and hurried away.

"Sorry for interrupting?" Cora's voice trailed off as she watched him leave. "I didn't mean to ..." She turned back to Peter with confusion written over her face. "Sorry?"

"It's fine, he was about to leave anyway," Peter assured her. She'd just witnessed Stiles chugging down half his drink, it was clear that Peter was lying but she accepted it.

"What were you guys doing here, anyway?" Cora recovered quickly.

"We had a little chat over coffee," Peter answered. For sure he would not tell her that they'd hashed out their second date.

"Does he have problems or something?" Cora asked. "Are we going to take him in?"

Peter had his cup half-way up to his mouth but he paused in mid-air, not following.

"What?"

"I was just thinking." Cora fiddled with a napkin. "When he came over the other day, we talked for a bit. He mentioned his uncle but when I asked where he lived, he didn't really answer."

"It's complicated." Peter sat down his cup.

"So, are we going to adopt him? That's why you're hanging out with him?"

Boyd, Erica, and Isaac had been adopted into the pack like that. Talia was not actively looking for additions to the pack, they were quite a large one already, but if they came across somebody who needed help, well, they wouldn't just turn their backs on them.

Troubled teenager had been Peter's first thought when Denise had told him about Stiles so it wasn't that far fetched.

"He has his uncle," Peter said. "He's looking after him, no need for adoption."

"If not that, why are you having coffee with him?" But then her face lit up with realization. "No way. This was a date? I interrupted a date?"

"It wasn't a date."

"I was right with your scent the other day. And now …" She took a deep breath. She shouldn't be able to find much but Peter had been watching Stiles molesting that straw for minutes, he had no illusions that that was still lingering in the air. "Is he the guy Mom's asking about?"

Of course, she connected the dots, she was too smart for her own good. Her excitement for figuring it out turned into something else rather quickly, though.

"How old is he?" She narrowed her eyes on him.

"Older than he looks," Peter answered truthfully. He knew what this looked like. He was a grown man and Stiles looked like a teenager. But it was not like that.

"I bet he's very mature for his age too." She even made the air quotes.

It was a common phrase to justify older men prying on teenagers, Peter had to give her that.

"No." Peter wasn't sure if mature was a word he would choose to describe Stiles. "I'm saying that he's old enough to do whatever he wants. The evening you're referring to? We spent that at his uncle's house. The sheriff knows about me seeing him and he's okay with it."

Cora studied him for a long moment, not buying it. She had seen Stiles. He looked like sixteen at most even if he claimed that he'd been eighteen when he'd stopped aging. But Peter wasn't going to tell her that. He'd told Talia because as the alpha she needed to know but he was not going to spread Stiles' secrets around the pack or the whole town.

"Let's make a deal." Peter became serious. "I'm not going to tell anybody about you liking girls and you're not going to tell anybody that I'm seeing Stiles." Not that he would tell anybody but Cora didn't need to know that.

"If it's okay to see him, why don't you want people to know?" She challenged him.

"Because sometimes people don't understand." Peter let out a sigh. If this thing with Stiles became more serious he would have to think about that. "But I swear, Stiles is old enough and I'm not taking advantage of him." He was looking her straight in the eye when he said it and he made sure

that his whole body was transmitting that he was telling the truth. "Do we have a deal?"

"Deal."

Chapter 21

Stiles fled the coffee shop when Cora showed up. He liked Peter and he was looking forward to watching more movies with him and he really hoped that Peter would stay true to his word and that they would have more animalistic sex but Stiles was not ready to meet the family. Especially not the Hale family.

The other day Stiles had made small-talk with Cora and she was okay, he guessed, but he didn't want to hang out with her. So he excused himself and left it to Peter to deal with her. In the car, Stiles made double sure that he had his bag with him, which he had with library books and everything, before he drove off. Not that he would have walked back into the coffee shop if he'd forgotten his bag again. Just no.

Stiles threw one last glance at the window where he could see Peter and Cora talking animatedly but then he started the car and left.

He stopped by John's house to pick up some fresh clothes only to find out that John hadn't gotten around to do the laundry. Cursing under his breath Stiles loaded the washing machine and then he was sitting on the couch in his underwear, releasing some of his frustration in a round of Call of Duty. Here at John's Stiles had a rather nice setup with a PlayStation hooked up to John's large TV, which John had gotten solely for that purpose no matter what he said, and sometimes Stiles spent a whole day here just playing some video games.

He got so absorbed in the game that he almost forgot to put the wet clothes in the dryer but eventually he left the house with a bag of clean clothes. They were even half-heartily folded.

On his way back to the lake, Stiles made a little detour to stock up on energy drinks and snacks and since he had to do the laundry he'd earned himself a cheeseburger and a large curly fries with cheese.

At the lake, Stiles took his food out to the pier. It was old and rotten and Stiles had to be careful to not break through the boards with his foot but it was still stable enough. Maybe he could get John to repair it. Or rather set up a new one. Either way, it would be a bigger project and John hadn't even gotten the time to repair a simple door. Or to do the laundry. Maybe he should ask Peter instead, Stiles mused.

He sat down at the end of the pier, feet hanging over the edge but the surface was still a few inches under his shoes. It wasn't warm enough for wet feet.

Stiles left the fries for last and attacked the burger first.

There was something under the surface, a shadow moving around which could have been a fish but Stiles knew better. He didn't even blink when a head broke through the surface.

"What are you doing out here?" Derek asked.

"Eating." Stiles held up his burger. "I have curly fries if you want some. With cheese." He had gotten a large, he had enough to share. More of Derek emerged from the water and with one smooth move he hoisted himself up to sitting next to him. Stiles got the food out of the way before Derek could soak it with the water dripping off him.

"Here." Stiles offered him the bag with the fries. Derek didn't need to eat but he did it from time to time to humor Stiles. Stiles had the suspicion that Derek did enjoy the food but he didn't call him

out on it.

After a second of hesitation, which was not fooling Stiles, Derek did reach into the bag. The cheese was deliciously stringy, Derek had to catch it with his tongue before he could put the fries in his mouth. Stiles bit back a laugh and returned to his burger.

They were quietly sitting there, watching out over the lake while Stiles was slowly munching his way through the remaining fries. They did this sometimes, just sitting here or at the shore, sometimes they talked, sometimes they didn't. Stiles liked these rare occasions.

"You're going to see that werewolf again, aren't you?" Derek asked. Stiles had told him when he'd left the other day for his date with Peter. In case that Derek had to come and get him, he didn't want him to be surprised by Peter being there as well.

"Thursday, most likely." Stiles fished the last fry out of the bag. "We have quite a few movies to go through." At least Derek got the concepts of movies. Not like with doors. Stiles had forced Derek to watch a few movies with him before but Derek was not good movie company. Or the best, it depended on the point of view.

Derek would sit there the whole time with his arms crossed over his chest and glare at the screen as if the people in the movie were personally offending him. It was kind of hilarious, especially with comedies but horror movies were even better. Watching a horror movie with a literal monster was just the best. That was the reason Stiles sweet-talked him into watching something with him once or twice a year.

"You sure it's a good idea to get involved with the Hales?" Derek asked. "They hurt you."

"Not the ones living today," Stiles reminded him. "But yeah, I don't want to get involved with them." That had been the main reason he'd left the second Cora had shown up. He didn't like the Hales and he didn't want that to change. Peter was the exception he was willing to make.

"Why him?" Derek asked.

"I don't know. I like him." Romantic feelings were also something Derek didn't understand but he got friendship. He and Stiles were friends and he was kind of friends with John as well. But that other kind of relationship? That was a foreign concept to Derek. Stiles wasn't even sure if he understood sex.

But he was always supportive. When Stiles wanted to have things like this, Derek was always telling him to just get it. Because that was a concept Derek understood way too well. If he wanted something, he took it. It was in his nature. Sadly, the things he wanted were the things he regretted later. He never wanted to murder anybody but if someone was dumb enough to come out to the lake for a swim, Derek couldn't help it, he wanted to take that person. The urge was so overwhelming that he couldn't even try to fight it. Stiles had seen it often enough. And he was the one who had to help Derek to pick up the pieces afterward. So yeah, Derek knew exactly how it felt to want something.

"On Thursday I'll try to stay away for as long as possible," Derek promised.

"Thanks, man."

Derek slipped off the pier and landed in the water with a splash, Stiles barely managed to keep his feet dry.

"You coming with me?" Derek asked.

"Na, I'll stay in the cabin for a little while." Stiles gathered the trash and stood. "See you later." He waved at him but Derek had already disappeared under the surface.

The next day, Stiles felt restless so in the early afternoon, he drove into town to entertain himself. Beacon Hills was not that big but it had a nice mall. Stiles liked to go there just to watch the people but maybe he could watch a movie or try out some new games.

At first, Stiles was just wandering around, he had no real determination in mind, and just enjoyed the people around him. There were families and couples, people alone or in groups. Stiles soaked it all up while he was walking by. He wondered what kind of lives these people would go back to later. If they had work or school tomorrow. If they were just aimlessly drifting. Like him.

"And now I'm sad," Stiles muttered under his breath and pushed himself off from the banister he'd been leaning against. From here he had a good view on the people on the floor below him.

"Stiles?" Suddenly somebody behind him spoke up.

"Are you stalking me?" He asked when he turned and found Cora standing behind him.

"I was here with a friend." She dismissed him.

"Was?"

"She had to leave." Cora let out a sigh and braced her forearms on the banister just like Stiles had a second ago. "But she bought me this." Her face lit up and she showed him the necklace she was wearing. "It's an arrow."

"It's nice," Stiles said because it was a necklace, what was he supposed to say to that?

"She likes buying me things. The other day she got me this cute top." She twisted around to show off her top.

"Sounds like more than just a friend."

"Maybe?" She blushed and turned back to looking down at the floor beneath them. "I don't know."

Stiles just smiled at that. Teenagers, how adorable.

As if you're any better, he could almost hear Peter's voice in his head.

"So," she said with a glance at him. "You and Peter?"

Now it was his turn to become all flustered.

"Also a maybe," he finally admitted. "We're just trying out if we fit. Did you know that he hasn't seen most of the Marvel movies?"

"What?" She sucked in a breath.

"My point exactly. But I'm going to change that." Stiles nodded to himself.

"So that's what you two are doing?" She asked."Watching movies? And having coffee dates?" The way she was asking, as if there was more to that question, made him perk up but he couldn't read her expression.

"Yeah." Stiles made. He was not going to tell her about Peter's claws on his dick. Or that he was

looking forward to what Peter had promised him.

Cora had the advantage of being a werewolf so she had more to go on than just his expression and Stiles was pretty sure that she knew exactly that movies and coffee dates were not all they were doing.

"Stiles? How old are you?"

Shit. Stiles wanted to slap his forehead, he hadn't thought about that.

"Eighteen," he answered which was even kind of the truth. But at the same time, it was a flat out lie and she caught on to that.

"You don't have to tell me if you don't want to." She almost growled at him but she caught herself before it became a full out growl. It was kind of unfair that he knew that she was a werewolf but she didn't know that he knew and that he wasn't plain old human either.

But for one, they were in the middle of the mall with people all around them, Stiles was not going to have that conversation here, and second, he had no desire to explain himself to the whole pack. Peter had confessed that he'd told Talia about him and Stiles was okay with that. Talia was the alpha, she needed to know at least the part about Derek, not the dating Peter part. Stiles was not okay with the whole pack in the know. He wanted to walk around town without getting pitying looks from every member of the Hale pack.

So Stiles chose to not explain himself and went back to watching the people downstairs. There was an uncomfortable silence hanging over them now and it didn't take long for Cora to back off.

"Gotta go," she said. "See you around?"

"Yeah," Stiles said. If things with Peter became more serious he would see her around more often. And most likely the rest of the pack as well. He was not looking forward to that.

She ducked into the crowd and Stiles wondered what she thought of him and Peter now. Statutory rape was a term coming to mind. He did not want anybody to think of Peter in terms like that but he couldn't do anything about it.

Stiles went to check what movies were on but nothing caught his eye so he started to wander around aimlessly again.

He passed a store with sporting goods right when a guy on his phone came out without looking. He almost slammed into Stiles and didn't even seem to notice.

"Hey!" Stiles called out. "Watch were you're going."

The guy didn't spare him a glance and just hurried off, still talking on the phone.

"I know that that ammunition won't do shit," the man said. "Ask Argent to hurry up with the wolfsbane bullets. And if he doesn't get the …" The rest of the sentence was lost to Stiles, the man already too far away, but the bit he'd heard made Stiles change directions.

There had been a few hunters coming to Beacon Hills over the years. Sometimes they had even looked past the werewolf pack and had a closer look at the lake. Stiles had his encounters with them, he knew the type. Besides, who else would be talking about wolfsbane bullets? And would be dumb enough to just blurt out stuff like that in a crowded mall?

Stiles followed the man.

Chapter 22

Like predicted Talia had backed off by Thursday because other things needed her attention. However, Peter knew that his second date with Stiles would make her more curious again.

Stiles was right, he could just tell her, she knew that Stiles wasn't some teenager he was taking advantage of but she also knew Stiles' backstory. Stiles might be using him to get to the pack, Peter could almost hear his sister's voice. He would be lying if he said that thought hadn't crossed his mind but he'd dismissed that idea a while ago. If Stiles wanted revenge, he would have gotten it ages ago. He could have sicced Derek on the pack and Stiles had admitted that it had been something he'd been thinking of, maybe was still thinking of today, but he hadn't.

And Stiles had admitted that he'd been to the Hale house over the years, watching them from afar. Stiles had plenty of opportunities for revenge but instead, he'd kept to his side of the town and had ignored the Hales for the most part.

Peter got that Talia would think in that direction. Or he was just projecting because as the left hand it was his job to think in that direction. Maybe she would just point out that Stiles had suffered enough by their hands, he didn't need Peter to play with him. Peter hadn't been serious with anybody since Olivia and he didn't even know where he was heading with Stiles here so that was a valid point. Maybe he should let it be.

But Peter was a selfish bastard so he didn't tell Talia that it was Stiles he was seeing and he didn't tell her where he was going when he left the house before dinner on Thursday.

They had agreed that he would bring food so Peter made a little detour to get that and then he was standing at the sheriff's door again. Across the lawn, he spotted the neighbor's dog who was snarling at him but didn't dare to come closer. Peter let out a warning growl to which the dog yelped and ran back to the house.

"Are you threatening the neighbors' dog?" Stiles had opened the door just at the right moment.

Peter cleared his throat.

"I brought food." He held up the bag in question.

"Sweet." Stiles stepped aside to let him. "By the way, is that a thing with you wolves?"

"What's a thing?" Peter walked over to the kitchen to set out the food while it was still hot. "And you wolves? That's just rude. We're not wolves."

"The thing with providing for your partner. Mate. Is mate a thing? Am I your mate? Are you courting me with food?" The questions just bubbled out of Stiles, Peter wasn't even sure if any of those were serious. "Sorry, I know about werewolves but on the other hand, I don't know about you. Like at all, you know?"

Peter handed him his food and indicated him to follow him out to the living room. Looked like they were about to have a serious conversation over dinner, better get comfortable for that.

"We like to take care of each other," Peter said and took his first bite. He didn't have Greek in way too long. "If a pack member is in distress or not feeling well, the others want to make it better."

"Like a big family," Stiles agreed.

"Humans and werewolves are not that much different," Peter said, watching him closely. "We're just a tighter knit."

"Sounds nice." Stiles stabbed a piece of meat with his fork. "Having a family like that."

There was a dark shadow in his eyes for a second but then he shook it off.

"Sorry, I'm killing the mood here." Stiles gave him a small smile. "So what about the other thing? Are you courting me with the food?"

"I want to have dinner with you," Peter answered. "I don't see anything wrong with that. And no, we don't have mates and we don't mate for life. Talia is divorced."

"I know," Stiles said with puffed-out cheeks. He was digging into his food for real now. "Was wondering about that. This is good, where did you get it? I didn't even know we have a Greek place in town. Let alone a good one."

"I'll show you," Peter promised. "I can take you out next time."

Stiles nodded to that, unable to speak around too much food stuffed in his mouth.

"But we have to be careful," Stiles said once he was able to speak again. "Met Cora at the mall yesterday, she was asking about my age. Didn't believe me when I told her that I'm eighteen. Which would still be a bit young for you because you're what? Forty?"

"Excuse me?" Peter put down his fork. "I'm thirty-six."

"Still way too young for me. You're basically jail bait." Stiles bit into a dolma. "We have quite an age gap, what will people think?"

Peter glared at him but couldn't help the amused smile tugging at his lips. He reached for his glass of wine because Greek food had to go with red wine. Stiles had wrinkled his nose when he'd seen the bottle but once he'd tasted it, he seemed to like it.

"Oh, by the way." Stiles got more serious. "Saw a hunter at the mall as well."

That made Peter pause.

"You sure it was a hunter?"

"He was talking about wolfsbane bullets on the phone." Stiles nodded. "Pretty sure he was a hunter."

Peter put down his glass and got his phone out. "Was it one of these two?"

"Yep, that one." Stiles tapped at the screen when Peter showed him the second picture. "Didn't get much of what he was talking about but he mentioned a guy named Argent."

"I can work with that."

"Followed him out to the parking lot," Stiles continued. "If you say pretty please I have a license plate and a name for you."

"You did what? Are you insane? He's a hunter." Peter couldn't believe it. "You don't just follow a hunter, he's dangerous."

Peter didn't want to think about what might have happened if Stiles had gotten caught. Hunters were not known for caring about things like collateral damage. If Stiles got too nosy it was quite possible that they would do something about him. With any luck, they would try to scare him off first.

"Down, boy." Stiles laughed at him. "I'm just a teenager, engrossed in my phone. I'm invisible."

"Still."

"Anyway. He was coming out of a store with sporting goods but I don't know if he bought anything. He was talking about ammunition not doing shit and that that Argent guy should hurry with the wolfsbane bullets," Stiles recapped his encounter. "The way he carried himself I'd say he was packing. From the store, he went straight out to the parking lot, no stops and he wasn't talking to anybody. Got his license plate and because I'm such a nice guy I let John run it for you."

Peter just stared at him. He wasn't sure if he wanted to kiss him or rip him a new one.

"So, what's that information worth to you?" Stiles popped the second half of the dolma into his mouth.

"What do you want?" Peter asked not sure if Stiles was joking or not.

"Five hundred bucks."

"A man who knows his worth." Peter gave him a nod of respect. "I don't have that much on me. Do you take I.O.U.s?"

"Heard the Hales always pay their debts." Stiles gave him a look but handed over a folded piece of paper.

"Thank you."

They finished their dinner, now with lighter topics, and then Stiles set everything up for the movie. To his surprise, Peter was looking forward to it. Not exactly to the movie, he'd liked the first one and he would enjoy this one as well, he didn't doubt that, but what he really was looking forward to was Stiles. He was always in motion, a fiddler by nature. But the way he'd been living the movie with shout-outs, a constant commentary, and with how he'd been watching Peter whenever one of his favorite scenes was about to come up, Peter liked that.

Usually, he hated people who couldn't watch a movie without disturbing the others but it was different with Stiles. He had a way that made Peter like to listen to his run-on commentary.

Peter had been smart and hadn't brought candy this time but they had popcorn and chips and the rest of the wine, they were set for now. Stiles started the movie and Peter sat back to enjoy the show.

Over the credits, Stiles asked if he'd liked it and what he'd liked the most. They almost missed the after credit scene because by then Stiles' was ankle deep in some meta-theory the fans had come up with. Peter didn't understand all of it, he was lacking quite some backstory here, but he enjoyed discussing this with Stiles.

Stiles had long turned off the TV and they were still talking about Marvel. Somehow they had moved on to the differences between the comic universe and the movie universe and apparently there were even different universes in the comics which made sense given for how long some of the series had been around. Peter had never been into comics, he wouldn't know, but Stiles knew

some pretty obscure details.

"Admit it, I'm boring you with this." Stiles stopped when his current argument had come to a closing point.

"Absolutely not. Consider me quite entertained." Peter meant it.

"And now you're mocking me." Stiles threw up his hands. "I can't help it. You might not remember it but there's been a time without computers and cell phones, TVs were in black and white and not everybody had one."

"I do remember those times," Peter corrected him. He didn't remember the black and white TV but he did remember his father ranting about wasting time and money when he'd brought home his first computer. Teenagers considered him old.

"Anyway, not much in terms of entertainment back then," Stiles continued. "So I read comic books. I could make a fortune if I'd kept all of them." He sighed in regret. "For years it was my obsession, still is. Kind of. Sue me, I like comic books."

"Not judging." Peter raised his hands in defense. "I like seeing you being passionate about something."

"What else do you like about me?" Stiles fluttered his eyelashes at him but it looked more as if he'd caught something in his eye.

"Smooth, Stiles, really smooth." Peter shook his head and reached for the bottle of wine. He divided what little that was left into their glasses.

"Hey, it's Netflix and chill," Stiles protested. "We did the Netflix part. So you can either listen to me ranting about Iron Man for the next hour or we move on to the chill part. Your decision."

"I like to listen to you," Peter said and set back with his glass, an expecting look at Stiles.

"I'm warning you, I can do this for hours."

"Not doubting that." Peter raised his glass and took a sip. He stayed relaxed and almost bored on the outside but on the inside, Stiles' scent made his mouth water. Over the last few minutes, the excitement for the movie had changed into another kind of excitement. Stiles was horny, there was no other way to put it.

"Or I can come over there and kiss that stupid smile off your face." Stiles tried a more direct approach.

"I have no doubt about that either." Peter swirled the last bit of wine around the glass before he finished it and put the glass aside.

Stiles had enough of his games. With a frustrated noise, he came over and smacked their lips together. Teeth clicked against teeth but Stiles was determined.

"I want you to mount me and I want you to do that shifted." Stiles threw Peter's words from the other day back at him. "And I want that now."

"We should move this over to your bed, then," Peter decided.

"Whatever." Stiles chased his mouth again. "I want you naked and I want your dick in my ass as

quickly as possible."

"Who said something about quick?" Peter raised an eyebrow at him. "I'm going to make you beg for it."

"I'm begging now." Done with waiting Stiles sneaked a hand between them and palmed him through his pants.

"Not nearly enough."

Chapter 23

Stiles made a needy noise in the back of his throat and when Peter scooped him up, he clung to him with his whole body like a giant koala. Peter carried him up the stairs like that and into the bedroom where he dropped him on the bed. Stiles landed with a yelp and in a flail of limbs but he recovered quickly. On his back, braced on his elbows he was looking up at Peter with hungry eyes.

"Get naked," Peter ordered and held his breath to see if Stiles would follow the order. Without breaking eye contact, Stiles reached for the hem of his shirt. It was a bit of a struggle but he got naked quickly and then he was back in the same position, stretched out on his back, braced up on his elbows and with that dark look in his eyes.

"Like what you see?" Stiles asked. His whole body was relaxed, he was comfortable, lying there bare and naked while Peter was looming over him, still fully clothed. Stiles' cock had started to fill but he didn't seem to be ashamed of that either.

"Very much." Peter licked his lips at the sight of lean muscles under miles of smooth skin dotted with moles.

"Come here." Stiles stretched out a hand, begging him to come closer. Peter crawled onto the bed until he was hovering over Stiles and he was close enough for another kiss.

"You're overdressed. Want to see you naked." Stiles started to tug at his shirt and Peter lifted his arms to help him to take it off.

"Hmm." Stiles made and ran his fingertip down Peter's sternum.

"Like what you see?" Peter gave the question back to him.

"Your v-neck was driving me crazy," Stiles admitted, his fingers tracing along the line of Pete's collarbone. "But you're still overdressed."

"In a minute." Peter wasn't in a hurry. He had plans with Stiles.

"How do you want to do this?" Stiles asked, still mapping out Peter's torso.

"I want to blow you," Peter informed him. "I want to finger you open. And then, when you're begging me to fuck you, I'm going to make you come in my mouth. And when you're spent and fucked out, I'm going to turn you around and mount you. Shifted. I'm going to make you take it."

Stiles was just staring at him with big eyes.

"Do you want that?" Peter asked because big talk was one thing, actually doing it was something completely different.

Stiles nodded like a bobblehead and his scent suddenly had a sharp edge, rich and musky, he was beyond turned on. Peter placed a kiss on the corner of his mouth and then he was slowly working his way down Stiles' body to where his erection was now standing proud and full. There was precome shining in the slit and Peter couldn't wait to taste it. The smell alone drove him insane.

"Lube?" He asked into the arch of Stiles' rib cage. He didn't mention condoms because he doubted that either of them was capable of carrying anything. Besides, he wanted to mark Stiles in every way possible and it would be a shame if his seed just ended up in a condom.

Stiles didn't even have to fumble for the lube, he had a bottle in easy reach.

"And now go on with the program."

"Cocky little bitch," Peter mumbled but hooked one of Stiles' legs over his shoulder to get better access. He ran his nose along the inner side of the leg, tickling the soft skin there before he paused for a second to inhale the rich scent of Stiles down here.

Stiles opened his mouth to tell him to hurry up already, no doubt, but then Peter took the head of his cock between his lips.

"Shit, Peter." Stiles keened when Peter sank down on him. Stiles might be the expert at blowjobs but Peter wasn't that bad either and it didn't take long until he'd reduced Stiles to a writhing mess.

"I'm gonna, I'm gonna …," Stiles chanted, only seconds from coming down Peter's throat.

"Not yet." Peter let go of him and reached for the lube.

Stiles cursed in frustration.

"Told you I want to finger you open." Peter poked a finger at his entrance. "Shifted I'm bigger there as well, better get you nice and loose first."

He took his time, adding one finger after another, scissoring and stretching until the rim gave and he could easily fuck three fingers in and out of Stiles. He made sure to stroke him in between just to keep him on edge but his main focus was on where his fingers disappeared in Stiles' body.

Peter had still his jeans on and he was straining against the tight fabric but at the moment his attention was solely on Stiles. Who was making the most delicious noises under him.

"Please, Peter." Stiles was begging for real now. Good.

Peter added a fourth finger and only when that one went easily in and out as well, he took Stiles back into his mouth.

Stiles cried in relief and it only took a few bobs of Peter's head to push him over the edge. The ring of muscles fluttered around his fingers and Stiles was coming deep in his throat. Peter curled his fingers to rub against Stiles' prostate while he swallowed around him to milk the last drops out of him. Only when Stiles started to whimper in discomfort, he let go of him.

"There you go." Peter sat back to appreciate his work. There was a thin layer of sweat glistering on Stiles' skin, his chest was heaving and his softening cock lay nestled in his curls. "Spent and fucked out."

Now Peter did get rid of his jeans, it was the only breather Stiles would get. A second later Peter was back and now he wanted his own release. He let Stiles watch while he generously coated his cock with lube, stroking himself. Then he shifted. Stiles had been watching him with big eyes but now he sucked in a breath. He was looking a bit worried now.

Peter stroke himself a few more times, minding the claws, but then lunged forward and grabbed Stiles by the hips. He flipped him over and then he shoved in with one hard thrust of his hips.

Stiles cried out in surprise but Peter's cock went in without much resistance. With both hands on Stiles' hips Peter was holding him in place but he gave him a moment to adjust.

"Damn, you're big," Stiles gritted out, fisting the sheets in search of something to hold on to. "Okay, do it. Make me take it."

Peter didn't have to be told twice.

Peter came with a howl and when he was pumping his seed deep into Stiles, he sank his teeth into the meat of his neck until he tasted blood. Stiles cried out, his whole body spasming under Peter with his own orgasm, wringing the last shocks of his orgasm out of him.

Peter came down slowly. Stiles was limp in his arms and he lowered him down gently. He twitched under him when Peter pulled out but otherwise, Stiles was just lying there. There was blood on his neck and the come leaking out of him was tinted red as well. Not much but it was there.

"Stiles?" Peter ran a worried hand down his neck, staying away from the bite mark. "You okay, Stiles?"

Stiles had fantasized about this, had wanted him to go all wolf on him and Peter had not held back.

"Shit," Peter muttered. It had been too much, he should have kept himself under control. Stiles had wanted to feel the prick of a claw. Not this. "Stiles?"

Finally, Stiles moved his head, rubbing his nose into the pillow. He was mumbling something but it was too muffled for Peter to make out the words.

"You with me?" Peter asked, now rubbing firm circles into his skin to get him more alert.

"Clean me up and then I want cuddles," Stiles said still into the pillow but clear enough for Peter to understand. Peter breathed out in relief.

He found the bathroom and quickly cleaned up himself before he came back to Stiles with a washcloth and a towel.

When he stretched out next to Stiles and drew the covers over both of them, Stiles snuggled closer until he could rest his head on Peter's shoulder.

"Was it too much?" Peter dared to ask. He had cleaned up the semen and the blood but both scents still hung heavy in the air.

"It was good." Stiles squished his face more firmly into his chest. "More than good." He was lying half on top of Peter, his body pliant and his eyes closed. Peter slung his arms around him and when Stiles' breath evened out and he fell asleep for real, Peter followed not much later.

Peter woke with a start. There was somebody standing in the doorway. The room was dark and even Peter could not make out much more than a silhouette against the rectangle of the open door.

"Who's there?" Peter asked. Stiles was still sleeping next to him and Peter made sure to keep himself between him and the intruder when he slowly stood, his clawed hands hanging loosely by his sides. He was still naked but that didn't bother him, his eyes were fixed on the man in the doorway. It was not the Sheriff, him he would have recognized instantly, so Peter was ready for a fight.

"Stiles needs to come with me," Derek said without making an attempt to come farther into the room.

Now Peter did recognize the form of the water spirit. Stiles had told him that Derek would come for him but somehow Peter had totally forgotten about that.

"He's sleeping," Peter said, still standing between Derek and the bed.

"That doesn't matter," Derek said. "He has to come with me."

Peter didn't know what to do. So he did the only thing he could think of, he shook Stiles awake. Which was easier said than done. Turned out Stiles was a heavy sleeper and it didn't help that Peter had fucked out his lights earlier. In between Peter put at least his underwear back on. Since it didn't look as if this was going to end in a fight, he didn't want his dick to flop around while Derek was watching him.

"Stiles." Peter shook him harder now. He didn't know how patient Derek was. Would he just drag a sleeping Stiles out of the bed? That would be one hell of a way to wake up. "Stiles! Derek's here."

Peter kept an eye on Derek, for sure he would not turn his back to him, but so far Derek hadn't moved. He was still standing in the doorway, waiting.

At least Stiles started to come around. He smacked his lips and muttered something under his breath but he did blink his eyes open.

"What?" The word came out as a toneless squeak.

"It's time to come home," Derek said.

"Five minutes." Stiles rolled to his side and drew the blanket over his head. That was not the reaction Peter had expected but Stiles may not be awake enough just yet to realize who was here to pick him up.

Now Derek did move. Peter expected him to come directly for Stiles and all his instincts were telling him to not let that happen but Derek was heading for the chair at the desk instead. Peter turned with him to not let him out of his sight.

Derek sat down and turned the chair so that he was facing Peter. Or Stiles who was somewhere behind Peter, it was hard to tell.

Nobody had bothered to turn on the lights and in the dim light, it was hard to make out Derek's expression. Since he'd sat down, he hadn't moved.

"Are you actually going to give him five minutes?"

"Yes," Derek said.

"Why?" Peter couldn't help but wonder. Stiles was Derek's and he would have to come with him eventually. Peter didn't like it but except for fighting Derek, which would be a very bad idea, there was nothing he could do about it.

"Because he said so," Derek answered as if it should be obvious. "Five minutes don't matter."

Behind him, Stiles had fallen back asleep so it looked like he would be alone with Derek for five more minutes.

Peter switched on the lamp on the nightstand and then he sat down on the edge of the bed. He was still mostly naked but that didn't seem important right now.

In the light, he studied Derek. He was dripping wet and there was a trail of water leading from the door to where he was sitting at the desk. While Derek was studying Peter from under thick eyebrows, Peter took the chance to study him in return. Droplets were glistering in Derek's scruff, his skin was too pale and had a damp sheen to it. Derek did pass as human but he kind of looked sick. A bit as if he'd drowned if Peter was honest. Which made sense given his nature.

"You're not going to hurt him, are you?" Peter dared to ask.

"I'm not the one who hurt him."

"Neither am I," Peter said, ignoring the scent of blood still lingering in the air.

Chapter 24

The bed was warm and cozy and Stiles just wanted to snuggle deeper under the covers. He was fucked out and ready to sleep for at least a few hours. But Derek was here. One part of Stiles' brain had registered that little fact but the majority of his brain chose to ignore it for now.

But then he remembered another little detail. Peter was here as well.

It still took Stiles a few more minutes to wake up enough to roll to his other side to find out what was going on. He almost smashed his face into Peter's butt.

"Why are you sitting in my face?" Stiles asked, totally ignoring the fact that Peter was almost sitting in the middle of the bed and that it was Stiles who for some reason was lying way too far down. Slowly Stiles came up to a sitting position to look around Peter's bare shoulder. He had put on his boxers but otherwise, he was naked. Just because it was right in his face, Stiles placed a kiss on Peter's shoulder blade.

Peter made a noise, telling him that this was not the right time for this, but he didn't turn around to look at Stiles. His eyes were fixed on Derek who was sitting at the desk. Dripping on the carpet. Stiles groaned.

"What did I tell you about carpets?" Stiles muttered not that it made a difference now, looked like Derek had been sitting there for a while.

Derek looked down as if only now he remembered that he was constantly dripping wet and not in a good way. At least he had the dignity to look sheepish.

For a second Stiles buried his face in Peter's back. All he wanted was to fucking sleep. He was sore, his neck where Peter had bitten him was on fire and he just knew that it would get worse once he tried to move for real. But looked like he had to take care of the carpet before he could go back to sleep. Great, just fucking great.

"I'll get some towels," Derek offered and got up. He would leave a new trail but that didn't matter at this point anyway. With a sigh, Stiles swung his legs out of the bed to sit next to Peter. His butt did not like that at all and he had to shift more to one cheek to sit somewhat comfortably.

"Man, you did a number on me." With his fingers, Stiles probed his neck. It was not bleeding any longer but he could feel the imprints of Peter's teeth.

"Are you okay?" Peter had a worried eye on him. Since Derek had left the room, he'd even dared to relax a bit.

"I'm good." Stiles let his head loll until his neck popped. "Listen, I have to go with him in a second here. You don't need to hurry, John won't be back home before ten in the morning. Take a nap, take a shower, whatever you want. Just close the door when you leave." Stiles leaned over to kiss him on the cheek before he hurried to gather his clothes.

Derek was back with the towels and together they took care of the puddle under the chair and then they were working their way backward out of the room and over to the bathroom. Peter was still sitting on the bed, watching them with interest but when they left the room, he followed them.

"Did it break your brain?" Stiles couldn't help but ask when Peter just stood there in his boxers. "Seeing Derek mopping the floor?" Okay, it was mostly Stiles mopping the floor but Derek was

helping, Stiles had to give him that. It didn't seem to fit in Peter's view of the world.

"Is he actually going to take you with him?" Peter wondered.

"We could take the jeep." Stiles threw the towels into a corner of the bathroom for John to take care of them. "But my ass is not in the mood for a car ride. We're going to take the expressway." He pointed at the shower. He would have to walk back into town tomorrow to get his car but at the moment he didn't care. He was just tired and he wanted to go back to sleep as quickly as possible.

Out of his pocket Stiles got a Ziploc bag in which he stored his phone. He'd learned that lesson the hard way since cell phones had become a thing, Derek and electricity did not go well together.

"I'll text you tomorrow," Stiles said and stepped into the shower with Derek. Sometimes he did wonder how this looked like from the outside. From his point of view, he was standing in the shower, Derek laid a wet hand heavy on his shoulder, this time the one Peter hadn't maimed, and then everything became a blur. Next thing he knew was that he was at the bottom of the lake.

Stiles just wanted to curl up in Derek there, his presence was comforting, but he did push himself to the surface instead to lay out his clothes to dry and to get his phone to a dry place. Only then he dove back into the lake and into the soft embrace that was Derek.

"Did you have fun?" Derek asked.

"Yes. It was fun. Good fun." Down here it was easy to let go. "I think you scared Peter."

"He tried to protect you," Derek said as if he couldn't quite believe it.

"Because you're so big and scary," Stiles teased him but it was half-hearted at best. He yawned and let himself sink deeper into Derek.

When Stiles came up to the surface the next day it was late in the afternoon, the sun was already half-hidden behind the trees. Stiles checked his phone before he did anything else and found three messages from Peter.

The first one just casually asking how he was doing. Given how their date had ended, it didn't come as a surprise. Peter had sent this one in the early morning, a time he knew that it was unlikely that Stiles would answer. The second message sounded more worried and the last one was just a *Call me*.

Stiles did take the moment to get dressed, his clothes had dried over night, at least that, before he flopped down on his bed and called Peter.

"Are you okay?" Peter answered after the first ring.

"I'm fine." Stiles stretched out. Sadly the soreness was gone along with the mark on his neck. He would have liked the marks Peter had left on him to linger but in that regard, he was similar to a werewolf. When he went into the lake, his body regenerated itself. However, last night was still lingering in his bones. He had healed but things like that tended to last longer.

"Did Derek …," Peter started but didn't seem to know how to end the question.

"I don't know what it looks like when he drags me through the pipes," Stiles admitted. "But I can assure you, it doesn't hurt or anything. It only lasts a second anyway."

"I don't like it."

Stiles wasn't a big fan of it either but there was nothing he could do about it.

"Where are you?" Stiles changed the topic.

"In the car, just dropped off Emily for her guitar lesson," Peter answered and didn't push the other topic. "I have some time to kill."

"Would you mind giving me a ride? My car's still at John's."

Half an hour later Stiles climbed into Peter's car.

"What?" He asked when Peter looked him up and down. "I told you, I'm fine."

Peter studied him for a moment longer but then he started the car.

"Your neck." Peter gestured over to where he'd bitten him last night. "It's gone."

"Sorry to disappoint you but you can't mark me for long." Stiles leaned back in the seat. This was way nicer than his old jeep, not that he would trade his jeep for anything but it was nice.

"How does it work?" Peter tugged at the collar of Stiles' shirt to check that indeed the bite mark was gone. Stiles didn't want to end up in a ditch so he leaned over to let him have a look at the smooth skin. "You didn't start healing right away. It was still fresh when Derek showed up last night."

Which had been quite a while after Peter had bitten him.

"Are you analyzing me?" Stiles asked, amused. But then he answered: "I heal when I'm with Derek."

"So you have a very short time until Derek comes to get you and once you're with him, you heal," Peter said, clearly filing away the information. "What happens if you die?"

"I'm already dead," Stiles said, looking out of the window. "What about you? Hope you didn't leave the house in a mess, John would kill me and then he would never allow me to have somebody over ever again."

Turned out that Peter had taken the offer of a shower and he had even started the washing machine with the towels before he'd headed out. And he'd made sure to close the door properly.

"You're going to be John's favorite son-in-law," Stiles joked. "At least you'll be invited again, we still have quite some movies to watch. And the sex, I want all the sex with you, that was awesome, I'm addicted. I think I have a kink for werewolves. Do you think I have a kink for werewolves? Or is it just you?" He was rambling now but Peter just shook his head in amusement so Stiles rambled on until they reached John's house. The cruiser was in the driveway right next to Stiles' jeep so Peter parked on the street.

"Thanks for the ride." Stiles reached for the door but then he spotted the fur-ball from hell. "Crap."

He let go of the handle. Things had been good, he'd had awesome sex last night and he'd just had a nice chat with Peter, he was not in the mood for the little ankle biter.

"You." He pointed at Peter. "You're going to be a gentleman and escort me to the door. And you're going to scare away every threat coming my way."

Peter gave him a confused look but then he must have spotted Buttons.

"Scared of a little dog?" Peter teased but got out of the car and came around to Stiles' door.

"Milady." Peter offered his arm to him.

"You're impossible, you know that?" But Stiles took the arm and let Peter escort him to the front door. Buttons did growl at them from the distance but Peter growled right back and Buttons ran yipping.

"I should keep you around just for that." Stiles grinned after the dog.

"I have my qualities."

"I do appreciate your qualities in bed," Stiles told him for which he got growled at.

Since he was here, he should say hello to John real quick. Peter was about to leave him at the door but Stiles had nothing of that and dragged him with him when he entered the house.

John had only gotten home in the morning but Stiles knew that he didn't sleep well at day so sure enough, they found the sheriff in the kitchen, nursing what had to be his morning coffee.

"Wondered when you would show up to get your car." John set the cup aside to greet his guests. "Must have been a long night if you left it here."

"We fell asleep." Stiles shrugged and let John fill in the blanks himself. The way John was looking at him, he was trying really hard to not picture it in his head.

"Peter, hope Derek didn't scare you last night." John turned to Peter, ignoring Stiles for now. "He can be quite …" He scratched his forehead with his thumb, searching for the right word.

"Intimidating," Peter offered.

"Big, scary werewolf is intimidated by Derek?" Stiles teased. "I have to tell him that."

"I'm pretty sure he knows," Peter said.

"I was sleeping while you two were trying to glare each other to death. How would I know? But you don't need to feel bad for losing against Derek," Stiles assured him. "With those eyebrows of doom? He's pretty intimidating."

"Stiles?" John asked in a long-suffering tone that Stiles had learned to ignore. "Shut up."

Peter had to pick up Emily so he declined the coffee John was offering but Stiles took a cup quite happily, it was kind of morning for him as well.

He thanked Peter again for giving him a ride and showed him out the door.

"I take last night went well?" John asked when they were alone.

"Very well." Stiles almost purred to which John hurried to say that he didn't want to know. Then Stiles remembered something: "But he still owes me five hundred bucks."

Chapter 25

Peter did watch when Stiles left with Derek. It was weird. It was kind of that they were there one second and just gone the other but at the same time, he could tell that they had gone through the pipes. The shower head was dripping slightly and it was moving the force going through it.

And then Peter was standing in his boxers in the empty bathroom. He waited for a moment longer but when nothing else happened, he got ready for a shower himself. It felt weird, turning on the shower, but the water was coming out as is it should and Peter took the time to wash off the scent of Stiles and sex thoroughly.

Before Peter left, he went through the house to clean up after them. Stiles had taken care of the puddles Derek had left but there was still the pile of wet towels in the corner so Peter put them in the washing machine. Then he made the bed and went downstairs to clean up the living room. It felt strange, moving around the house of a stranger in the middle of the night. Not that he hadn't done that before but never before had he put dishes in the dishwasher over that. But John had been kind enough to let them borrow his house, the least he could do was to leave it in a clean way.

It was past three in the morning when Peter finally came home.

The house was quiet but he found Talia curled up on the couch where she had been waiting for him but had fallen asleep like a kid, trying to stay awake for Santa. She did wake up when he entered the room, though.

She had a disorientated look around and had to comb her fingers through her hair to even see but then she was sitting there, looking proud of herself for catching him sneaking in in the middle of the night.

"If you ask if I know what time it is, " Peter threatened, "I will call you mom for at least three days."

Talia glared at him but didn't ask that question. She did, however, sniff the air to read him.

"You showered." She made a face.

"After last time? Of course, I did." He was tired but too wired to sleep just yet so instead of excusing himself, he sat down in a chair and stretched out his legs.

"Is he good for you?" Talia asked.

"Yeah, I think he is," Peter answered. He was still convinced that Talia would be way less supportive if she knew who he was seeing so he didn't give her that little detail. Besides, where would be the fun if he just told her?

"That's good." She gave him a smile that was big sister and caring alpha all at once. "You deserve something good."

Peter didn't point out that he already had something good. He had a pack and a good alpha, he had people who loved him. But he got what Talia meant.

"But I still want to know who he is." She glared at him as if that would be enough for him to tell her.

"Not yet."

"Okay, if you're not going to tell me, I'm going to bed." She stretched. "Don't stay up too late."

Her fingertips brushed over his shoulder when she passed him and then Peter was alone.

Peter couldn't get Derek out of his head. He had come to bring Stiles back to the lake, that hadn't come as a surprise. But Derek had waited until Stiles had been ready to go with him and he'd even helped to clean up the mess he was leaving everywhere. That didn't fit the picture Peter had of the lake monster.

Stiles had called Derek a friend. Back then Peter hadn't believed it. Now he was getting there. But he kept his mind open to the possibility that Derek was holding Stiles on a very long leash and that he could and would use his power over Stiles whenever he wanted to.

Not getting anywhere with those thoughts, Peter made his round around the house and then he turned in.

Peter had been home late but he was still one of the first to be up in the morning. He had breakfast with his family and it did come up that he'd been out late last night but at this time of the day, nobody was up for more than some good-natured teasing before they piled out to go to school or work.

Peter retreated to the library. Aside from his room, this was the only room in the house where nobody would bother him. He turned on the computer there and typed the name Stiles had given him into the search bar.

Over the next hour, Peter pieced together a picture of Daniel Page. He was a hunter, that became clear after only a minute. He had a criminal history, was switching places often and never held a job for longer than a few months. The classical hunter who tended to leave behind messes and had to leave town in a hurry more often than not. Peter found a few names associated with him but he didn't find a match for the other man who'd been at Bob's gun shop the other day.

Around nine Peter shot Stiles a message but at this time of the day, he didn't expect an answer. However, he couldn't get last night out of his head and he was not talking about the good part here. Peter couldn't stop thinking about how Derek had taken Stiles with him. He needed to know that Stiles was okay.

When Stiles hadn't answered by noon Peter wrote another message. He might sound a little desperate by now but he didn't care. He wrote Stiles third one when he was about to drive Emily to her guitar lesson and if Peter didn't get an answer until he'd dropped her off, he would skip the library and drive out to the lake instead.

Emily had just left the car when Stiles called him. Peter would have asked to see him anyway so he agreed easily to giving him a ride to collect his car.

That he would meet the sheriff over that had not been the plan but that encounter went way better than Peter would have expected. They had wild sex under this man's roof last night and John knew it. And still, the conversation didn't turn awkward.

Peter was still glad that he had a good excuse to not linger around. So he said his goodbyes and went to pick up Emily.

After dinner, he retreated to the library again to have a closer look at the other name Stiles had given him. Which reminded him that he still owed Stiles five hundred dollars for the information.

Peter made a mental note to give Stiles the money next time he saw him because Hales did pay their debts.

With only a last name it would be harder to find the right person but as a first step, Peter did type "Argent" into the search bar and hit enter. First thing was that Google asked him if he meant "Argentum" which was Latin for silver. Peter knew that and politely informed Google that he, in fact, was looking for "Argent".

As a derivative from the Latin word, Argent and similar names did show up in most Romance languages which was nice to know but didn't help with his search.

It took a while but in the end, Peter managed to narrow it down to two entries in the area. One was a substitute teacher at the High School, he'd even heard of her before, that she would stay for the year or something like that, Cora was in her class, he could ask her, but Stiles had clearly stated that Plant had been talking to a male Argent so Peter's focus was immediately on the other Argent who had come up.

Christopher Argent, arms dealer by trade and since two weeks ago a resident of Beacon Hills. He wasn't open for business yet so it didn't come as a surprise that Peter hadn't heard of him.

"Well, nice to meet you, Mr. Argent," Peter said to the picture of a man roughly his age.

It took a little more digging but Peter found out that Chris Argent was married and had a daughter. The daughter was currently living with Chris' father in France but his wife Victoria, a woman with an icy glare, had moved to Beacon Hills with him.

The more Peter was looking into Chris, the clearer it became that he was not just an arms dealer, he was a hunter. And not just that, he was coming from a long line of hunters. Argent apparently was a big name in the hunter community in France. Which reminded Peter of something. He had read about something like this before.

It was way after midnight and Peter was reading his way through a tale he'd found in a book from the seventeenth century. It was written in an obscure mix of Latin and old French and Peter needed cross-references for every other word but he got the gist of the story. Someone named Argent had killed a beast that had been terrorizing a French village for weeks. Or he'd killed it with *argent* meaning silver. The silver thing was a myth but it had been part of werewolf legends since the dawn of time, especially in Europe where most werewolf packs had originated from.

Peter leaned back in his chair and rubbed his eyes. His back was stiff and his eyes sore and he wasn't even sure if the last few hours hadn't been a huge waste of time. If he was right, than one of Chris Argent's ancestors had killed at least one werewolf centuries ago. If that man had been the first hunter in the line or if it had been a family tradition before that Peter couldn't tell but it didn't matter. What mattered was that Chris most likely had been trained to hunt werewolves from an early age which made him even more dangerous than the average hunter.

Peter wondered if that was the reason Chris' daughter was back home in France with her grandfather. Was she in training to become a hunter of the next generation?

Either way, Peter would have to keep a close eye on Chris Argent. How had he missed him until now? And he still needed to find that other hunter. He was still missing a name for Daniel Page's partner but he was getting there.

It had gotten late again but tonight Peter fell into bed with the good feeling that he had accomplished something.

The next day Peter started to ask around about Chris Argent.

He, however, did it more discreetly than Talia when she was asking about the man he was seeing. By the end of the day, Peter had checked out the address, turned out the Argent couple lived in a nice house in a nice neighborhood, and he'd had a little chat with a lovely old lady who'd been walking her dog. She didn't know the Argents well, they had just moved in, but they had come over to introduce themselves and Victoria had brought cake. Very nice people, at least according to the old lady. Peter didn't know what Chris had told his neighbors what he was doing for a living but Peter doubted that it was arms dealer. Or hunter of werewolves for that matter.

He didn't want to be seen, lingering around, so he left after his chat with the old lady, but he would return later in the evening when he could hide in the dark. Maybe he could see or hear something.

It meant another night with little sleep but Peter was on the hunt, adrenaline was kicking in.

However, observing the Argents turned out to be rather boring. Basically, Peter watched them watching TV over which they barely spoke. And then they went to bed. Peter waited until he was sure that they were asleep before he left.

I just spent three hours hiding in some bushes just to watch a couple watching TV, he wrote to Stiles when he was back in his car which he'd parked in another street.

Do I want to know why you're hiding in bushes, stalking people? Came Stiles' prompt answer.

Following up on the lead you gave me, Peter answered. *BTW I haven't forgotten about your money, you'll get it next time I see you*

Movie night on the weekend? Stiles asked. *But I have to check in with John first*

It was Friday, late in the evening, so Stiles was talking about tomorrow or Sunday.

Rather Monday or Tuesday, Peter wrote back. He might be getting old but he wanted a good night's sleep for once and it wouldn't sit right with him if he didn't keep an eye on the Argents at least for a day or two just to get a feeling for them. And who knew, maybe the other hunters showed up there as well.

Chapter 26

The other hunters did not show up. And the Argents didn't do anything interesting either. They were still settling in and more busy unpacking boxes than meeting with hunters or doing anything else that would give Peter a hint.

Peter didn't stay for long over the day, Chris was a trained hunter and with that paranoid by nature and would get suspicious rather quickly, but he placed a small camera in a tree next to the house. It didn't overlook the whole area and didn't get audio from inside but it was enough to give Peter an impression of what the Argents were doing over the day. Once it was dark, he was back on his observation post just to listen in on them while they were watching a movie.

All in all, the weekend was wasted.

On top of that, John was working the early shift all week, meaning that he would be home in the evenings so no movie night with Stiles either. It was frustrating and by Monday Peter was ready to explode. He was snapping at pack members and Talia even told him to go for a run to get rid of his bad mood. He snapped at her too.

Even his texts with Stiles were clipped.

Come over to the cabin, Stiles wrote out of the blue. It was Monday evening, most of the pack had gathered in the living room like usual but today Peter couldn't stand the noises so he'd retreated to the library. He wanted to do some more research on the hunters or Derek or whatever but he did not have the patience for any of that.

He didn't know where this was coming from, usually, Peter was more patient but today frustration was grinding on him. He had the suspicion that the main reason wasn't the wasted weekend, it had only been two days, what did he expect, but rather the canceled date with Stiles. Not that he would admit that to anybody, he was not a horny teenager.

So when he read Stiles' message, Peter didn't ask what this was about, he just answered that he was on his way. Half an hour later he parked the car in the usual spot not far from where Stiles was hiding his jeep when he wasn't using it.

Suddenly a car came down the road, catching him in the headlights. It came to a halt behind him and a deputy stepped out.

"What are you doing out here, sir?" The deputy asked. If Peter was not mistaken, this was the same deputy he'd been hiding from the other day. At least today he didn't have a body with him.

"Just stretching my legs," Peter answered and tried for a winning smile which felt too forced to look natural.

"This is private property."

"I didn't know that." Peter faked innocence but he wasn't winning any Oscars today. "I'm sorry, I'll be on my way, deputy."

Of course, the deputy stayed until Peter actually left. This was not his day.

Peter parked his car a mile away from the path and made sure that it wasn't easily spotted from the road. Then he went straight into the woods. He didn't know these parts of the woods but the lake

should be hard to miss and since he wasn't carrying a dead body, he could move more freely.

He did come out at the lake but far off and he had to walk along the shore for quite a while to get to Stiles' cabin.

"What took you so long?" Stiles asked when he finally entered the cabin.

"Don't ask," Peter gritted out.

Having a look around, Peter realized that he'd never been in here with the lights on. There were only a few, illuminating the room with a warm light. It was quite cozy, especially with the rustic charm of the wooden cabin.

Stiles was lying on his bed with his laptop but he'd rolled to his side to face Peter when he'd entered.

"I got your message," Peter filled the silence when Stiles just kept looking at him. "What do you want?"

"Company," Stiles said. He closed the laptop and set it aside. "And it looks like you need some distraction."

"I have to warn you, I'm not good company at the moment." He plucked a twig off his sleeve. Since he'd taken the rough route here there were more twigs and leaves stuck to him. Among other things. His dry cleaner would have a word with him tomorrow.

"I said company, not good company." Stiles patted the blanket next to him.

Peter shook his head at him but followed the invitation.

"Is this a booty call?" Peter stretched out next to him.

"Only if you want it to be." Stiles reached over and traced along the line of his v-neck.

"I don't know what I want right now," Peter admitted with a frustrated huff. Sex would release some of his tension, that was for sure, but he didn't know if he was in the mood for that. At the moment he wasn't in the mood for anything. He was just angry and frustrated and he got even more frustrated over the fact that he didn't really have a reason to be frustrated in the first place.

Stiles kissed him on the mouth.

It was just a soft brush of dry lips over dry lips but it broke through the thoughts running circles in his head.

"Want me to blow you?" Stiles asked, looking down on him with a mischievous smirk. His tongue darted out to lick over his lips.

"Go ahead." Peter waved at the general direction of his lower body. Maybe if he just lay here and let Stiles take care of him, his head would clear.

Stiles didn't have to be asked twice and a second later he was yanking down Peter's pants. He tucked the waistband of his boxers behind Peter's balls and then the wet heat of Stiles' mouth surrounded him. Peter was still soft and didn't even feel aroused at the moment but Stiles' mouth on him would fix that soon.

Peter closed his eyes and just enjoyed what Stiles was doing down there.

Patiently Stiles was sucking him to full hardness before he even started with his special moves. The way he was able to curl his tongue around the head of Peter's cock was unbelievable.

Stiles never took him too deep but he licked and nibbled his way up and down the shaft before he dove in again, lips stretched around him.

It didn't take long for Peter's frustration to turn into another kind of frustration. He didn't know how Stiles did it, his mouth was constantly working him over one way or the other, but he kept him on edge for what felt like hours. Every time Peter was close to coming, Stiles switched tactics.

"Fuck, Stiles," Peter growled through too many teeth, his claws helplessly fisted in the blankets.

Stiles did let him come eventually but by then Peter was a writhing mess and he was close to taking matters in his own hand, to just push Stiles' head down until he would come down his throat but Peter kept that last bit of self-control and shredded the blanket instead.

He came with a strangled cry, hips bucking under Stiles who was just riding it out with him. When Stiles finally let go of him, half his face was smeared with saliva and semen, his eyes in a daze but he was grinning happily. Peter felt his cock twitch at that sight, Stiles looked fucked out just from blowing him, but at the moment all Peter could do, was to just lie there with his legs trembling, chest heaving and to slowly come down from his high. He was lying in a pool of sweat and Stiles' saliva, mixed with his own release which made it even stickier but at the moment he couldn't care less.

Stiles wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his shirt before he stretched out next to him.

"Feeling better?" Stiles asked, studying him with an amused expression.

Peter just nodded, his brain was not cooperating right now.

"Where did you learn how to blow a man like this?" Peter wondered because damn. It had been way too long since somebody had given him head but he did not remember anybody being this good at it. Nobody should be giving head like this.

"Natural talent and practice." Stiles shrugged. He was back to tracing the line of Peter's v-neck.

"Give me a minute." Peter's features had returned to human, he felt it, but the words still came out kind of slurred.

"I'm good," Stiles assured him. "Wanna take a nap?"

Stiles didn't wait for his answer and just drew a blanket over them.

Peter wanted to protest but under the blanket Stiles tucked him back into his boxers and helped him out of his shoes and jeans before he was snuggling up to him, head resting on Peter's shoulder.

Looked like there were taking a nap. Peter hadn't slept much the last few days, that might be one of the reasons for his frustration, and his brain was still muddled, Stiles had sucked it right out of his dick, so Peter let out a breath and closed his eyes. Just for a minute.

When he opened his eyes again, the cabin was dark and it felt late at night. Stiles was sleeping next to him, in the small bed they had to lie close and Stiles had thrown an arm and a leg over him like an octopus.

After Peter had orientated himself, he rarely woke up in places not his bedroom, and had made sure

that Derek wasn't standing in the door to drag Stiles back into the lake he settled back again and closed his eyes. He could sleep for a few more hours.

The next time he woke, the cabin was lit by sunlight but judging by the angle of the beams coming through the closed shutters, it was still early. Stiles was already up but he had his back to Peter while he was doing something at the stove. The smell of coffee was filling the air along with the sizzling of fried bacon.

"Morning," Stiles greeted him when he noticed that Peter was awake.

"What time is it?" Peter rubbed his face to get more alert.

"Almost seven." Stiles was focused on whatever he was doing. "Sorry, I can't offer you much, I don't do this often anymore so I don't have much lying around."

Only now Peter noticed the smell of smoke, the stove was not operating with electricity.

"What are we having?" Peter asked with a suspicious eye on Stiles who was blocking the view on what he was doing.

This was the guy who had burned popcorn in the microwave. John even had left a note, telling him to let Peter make the popcorn. Stiles was prohibited from even touching John's stove. The man knew Stiles well. And here Stiles was, cooking over fire. Peter considered himself lucky that he hadn't been burned in his sleep.

"Coffee, toast, eggs and bacon," Stiles answered, already filling the plates. "I keep some basics around but I haven't cooked here in decades."

For a second Peter wondered where Stiles had hidden the coffee maker, he had power in the cabin but so far Peter hadn't seen something like a coffee maker. Turned out that Stiles was brewing his coffee the old fashioned way with a kettle and the filter directly on the mug. He even had a wooden coffee grinder, the kind with a crank and a little drawer to collect the ground beans.

While Peter scrambled into his pants, Stiles set the table.

Peter had a skeptical look at the plate Stiles had placed in front of him but everything looked and smelled fine. Well, the coffee had kind of a burned scent and when he took his first sip, he almost spat it out again. This was not like the coffee he was usually having.

Stiles laughed at him over the rim of his mug.

Peter took another sip and he had to admit that it wasn't too bad. Just very different from what he was used to. The food had a smoke aroma, Stiles had toasted the bread over the open flames but it was good.

"I feel like I've been transported back in time," Peter admitted when he dug into his breakfast. "And I'm really glad that you didn't burn down the house." He pointed at the stove which was still radiating heat.

"That one I know but the electrical ones? We ain't gotta be friends." Stiles' voice slipped into a drawl and Peter wasn't sure if he was just goofing around or if he'd slipped into how he must have spoken a long time ago.

"Did you stay the whole night?" Peter wondered. "Didn't Derek …" He gestured in the direction of the lake.

"I can stay here, it's close enough," Stiles said around a stripe of bacon hanging out of his mouth. "But I'm going to go under soon so don't expect me to answer you for a while."

Chapter 27

Stiles wasn't even sure why he asked Peter to come over. It was just that over the last few days, Peter's messages had become shorter and more clipped, he didn't do small talk at all and he answered Stiles' rants with just a word or two. Just to break out into a rant himself now and then about how not helpful the Argents were and that Peter couldn't find those damn hunters and that his family was getting on his nerves. After such a rant, he said sorry for ranting like that and then he was back to monosyllabic answers for a while. It was not hard to see frustration building up there.

So Stiles told him to come over.

Which turned out to be the right thing. After Stiles blew him into Nirvana, Peter slept like a baby. Looked like he needed the sleep. And in the morning he was more mellowed out, sipping his coffee at ease and relaxed.

Peter told Stiles in detail what he'd found out about the hunters in town, something short text messages were not good for, and Stiles got the feeling that he needed to tell somebody to sort his thoughts. So Stiles listened to him and threw in a word here and there to get the wheels in his head going.

After breakfast, Peter cleaned up as best as he could. Stiles didn't have a shower out here so Peter had to do with a bowl of water Stiles heated up on the stove.

"You're not going to going to dunk your junk in there, are you?" Stiles asked when Peter washed his nether regions which had to be sticky with dried come and saliva, Stiles had slobbered all over him. Peter just glared at him but used a cupped hand and a cloth to clean himself up.

"At this time nobody should be home, I might be able to sneak in and take a shower without starting a new round of rumor," Peter said when he tucked himself back in his boxers and put his jeans back on. Stiles didn't need to be a werewolf to know that Peter himself and his clothes as well were reeking of sex and Stiles.

"Good luck with that." Stiles kissed him goodbye and then he watched as Peter walked into the woods. With a sigh, Stiles closed the door and started to clean up. Peter had shredded one of his blankets and another one was strained with his juices. Stiles threw out the first and put the second one in a bucket to soak.

Peter had left an envelope on the table and Stiles didn't even need to check, there would be exactly five hundred dollars in there.

"Way to make me feel like a cheap whore," Stiles muttered when he tucked the envelope away. "Well, not exactly a cheap whore."

The money was not for the blow-job, it was payment for the information Stiles had given Peter the other day, the timing was just bad and Stiles knew how it must look like to an outsider. That thought made him laugh.

At least Peter had promised to make it up to him soon, delivered with a growl and a flash of his eyes, and that was something Stiles was looking forward to. Peter was eye candy on an average day but shifted? Damn, Stiles was down for that.

Stiles had one last look around to make sure that everything was in order before he stripped down

to his underwear and went outside. He didn't mind Derek seeing him naked but he had to walk the short distance over to the lake and he didn't want to flash anybody by accident, again, so he'd gotten used to at least wear his underwear or some kind of shorts when he walked out into the lake. Aside from Peter nobody had bothered him out here in years but better safe than sorry.

Stiles locked the door and a second later he was diving into the lake.

He hadn't lied when he'd told Peter that he could stay at the cabin, it did count as staying with Derek, but whenever Stiles did stay there for longer periods of time, he felt the need to go back into the lake. It wasn't urgent, he could have stayed in the cabin the whole day if he'd wanted to but since he couldn't show up in town at this time of the day anyway, he decided to go under for a little while.

A little while turned out to be almost the whole day and he had to hurry to be on time for his dinner with John. Stiles had missed those before, not often but it did happen, and by now John knew that Stiles sometimes got lost down there. Not too bad, he wasn't losing days … often but it happened that he came up a day late.

Before he headed out, though, he checked his phone and sure enough, there was a message from Peter waiting for him. Just to check in with him, nothing important and Stiles answered in the same manner, telling Peter that he was on his way to see John for dinner.

Peter answered a second later with a picture he must have taken secretly. It was of his family at the dinner table. There were heads stuck together in animated conversations, people laughing and just having a good time. It was titled "Having dinner as well"

Stiles stared at the picture for a long moment. Peter wasn't one who gave out private information easily and this was another level of private information. This was his family, his pack and he wanted Stiles to see them.

You're a lucky man, Stiles wrote back. He couldn't deny the little stab of jealously in his chest. Peter had a big family, there were fourteen people permanently living in the Hale house alone with the extended family spread all over town. And here was Stiles, alone in his remote cabin and his only friends were the local lake monster and the sheriff. He couldn't even remember his mother's face.

Stiles was late for dinner with John but he'd needed a few minutes to compose himself.

He was happy with his life. Sure it wasn't like what people considered a perfect or even an okay life but it was his. He liked how things were, even if he could, he wouldn't change a damn thing. But knowing that Peter was surrounded by his family, by people who loved him, that did something to him.

"Stiles?" John had one look at him to know that something was up.

"It's nothing." Stiles gave him a weak smile. John didn't believe him but he didn't push. Instead, he stacked their plates, grabbed the silverware and moved everything over to the living room.

"Get the glasses," he told Stiles over his shoulder while he was setting the coffee table.

Stiles wanted to protest, he wasn't having a bad day, that picture just had caught him off guard and he would be in a better mood in a minute here but in the end, he grabbed the glasses and the napkins and followed John out to the living room.

They ate in front of the TV, watching some procedural cop show, and it didn't take long for both of

them to groan and rant at the stupid characters on screen.

"Feeling better?" John asked when the episode was over.

"Yeah." Stiles rubbed the back of his head. "It's just … Peter sent me a picture of his family earlier and well, it got to me." He was not going to show John the picture, that was private, but this was enough for John to get the picture, so to speak.

John didn't have any close relatives either, Claudia had died almost twenty years ago but neither she nor John had family living around here. John had a few friends and once over the summer he invited the whole station for a BBQ but there weren't many people in his life either. Stiles kind of was the only family he had and vice versa, it was kind of sad actually.

At least John got it. Partly. Because John would grow old and die and then Stiles wouldn't have anybody. Well, except for Derek. Derek would always be there.

They sat there for a long moment, both lost in their thoughts.

"Sorry for dragging you down with me," Stiles said. He was feeling better but the bad thoughts were still lingering in the back of his mind and now it was the same for John.

"We're not going to sit here all evening, feeling sorry for ourselves." Stiles clapped his hands. "This calls for the board games."

There weren't that many games that worked well with two people but over the years they had gathered a nice little collection.

They played until Derek showed up to fetch Stiles and they even managed to rope him into a few games of Uno before Stiles left with him. They took the jeep so he wouldn't have to pick it up tomorrow.

"Thanks for playing with us," Stiles said when they were in the car and on their way out to the lake. "I know it's not your thing."

"I don't mind," Derek said. "You were having fun."

"It was even more fun, kicking your ass." Stiles threw him a grin. "You're bad at Uno. Who's bad at Uno? Five-year-olds play better than you."

"Next time I'm just going to drag you through the pipes," Derek promised darkly. He was glaring at Stiles from under thick eyebrows but Stiles had to keep his eyes on the road so the glare of doom was easy to dismiss. Not that Derek would follow threw with his threat, he was a marshmallow on the inside. Sure, he did drag Stiles through the pipes from time to time but more often than not he was okay with Stiles driving them back. That might change if Stiles didn't start to keep a better eye on the time. He'd gone for years without staying out too long but lately? It felt as if Derek had to come for him every other day. Derek was a very patient guy, real chill actually, but even he would get sick of going after Stiles this often eventually.

"I'll keep an eye on the time next time," Stiles promised to which Derek nodded, an easy to miss smile playing on his lips. Or maybe he did like to have a reason to come out of his lake and scare the shit out of Peter or lose five games of Uno in a row. Stiles knew him for ages but he was still discovering new sides of Derek.

Stiles was about to park his car in the usual spot where it wouldn't be seen from the road when the lights of a cruiser from the sheriff's department flashed behind him.

"Seriously?" Stiles groaned. It was nice and dandy that John was keeping people away from the lake and his deputies were doing a really good job with this but they were not supposed to keep him away.

"What are you doing out here, sir?" The deputy asked before he even looked at Stiles.

"Evening to you too, Parrish," Stiles greeted him.

"Stiles?" Parrish did a double-take, he'd clearly not expected to see him out here. Had he not looked at his car? The jeep was pretty distinctive and everybody at the station knew that it belonged to Stiles. But it was the middle of the night and Parrish looked tired, Stiles was willing to cut him some slack.

"What are you doing out here?" Parrish had recovered from his shock. "Does your uncle know where you are?"

John did know but Stiles didn't tell him that, it would lead to the question of why John allowed his teenage nephew to be out here in the woods at this time of the evening.

"And who are you?" Parrish shone his flashlight right into Derek's face. In the harsh light, Derek looked even paler than usual, his face had a greenish sheen under the moisture constantly on his skin. Stiles was used to mopping up puddles every time he gave Derek a ride.

"Sir?" Parrish asked when Derek didn't answer. "Are you alright?"

"I'm giving him a ride home but he said that he's feeling sick. That's why we stopped here," Stiles blurted out the first thing coming to mind. To his surprise, it was a pretty good lie.

"You're not going to throw up, are you?" Parrish kept Derek in the beam of his flashlight, still not sure what to think of him. "Can you show me some ID?"

"Is that really necessary?" Stiles groaned, this was getting better and better. "Look at him, he just wants to get home and sleep it off. Why are you bothering this poor man?"

"Because your uncle is going to have my hide if he hears that you're driving around in the middle of the night with a man at least ten yours older than you. ID please."

Chapter 28

From Stiles' cabin, Peter had to walk a few miles to get back to his car but contrary to last night, he enjoyed the walk through the woods. The air was brisk and clear but he could already tell that it would warm up over the day. He was in no hurry to get back home so he walked slowly with his senses open. He caught the scent of a deer that had come across here a while ago. He didn't go after it, he wasn't here for that but for a minute or two, Peter followed it's scent just because.

He did make it to his car eventually and when he came home, all the frustration and anger were gone.

Everybody had already left for the day, the only one still in the house was Walter but since he was human, he didn't pick up on Peter's scent.

"Long night?" Walter asked when he came into the kitchen. Peter was wearing the same clothes as yesterday, he'd slept in his shirt and hiking through the woods hadn't helped either.

"Kind of." Peter made his way farther into the kitchen. "Is there coffee left?"

The one he'd had at Stiles' had been surprisingly good but now he needed the taste of the coffee he was used to.

"Do I want to know what you've been up to all night?" Walter was looking him up and down, the newspaper in front of him forgotten for the moment.

This wasn't the first time Peter had come home like this, sometimes in worse shape and covered in blood like the night he'd met Stiles. Peter got where Walter was coming from. Without the nose of a werewolf, he wasn't able to tell the difference between the morning after some good sex with a relaxed hike through the woods afterward and staying out all night in the woods to keep them safe from whatever was lurking out there this time. Peter wasn't going to tell him, though. That would only get Talia back to breathing down his neck with questions about his secret lover.

So Peter just fixed himself a coffee and sat down at the kitchen table with Walter. He stole the part of the newspaper Walter was done with and skipped over the headlines. He didn't read the newspaper often, he had news feeds keeping him updated with everything he needed to know but after having breakfast cooked on a stove with actual fire, it seemed to fit that he read the news the old fashioned way as well.

Nothing caught his eye. Peter liked to stay up to date with what was going on in the world but his main focus was on Beacon Hills. He read the local news but aside from a new book club that would have their weekly meetings at the library and might interfere with his times there, nothing interesting was happening in Beacon Hills.

"I need a shower." Peter finished his coffee, patted Walter on the shoulder and then he headed upstairs to take care of his scent before somebody with a wolf's nose came home. Besides, he still felt sticky between his legs. After his shower he put his clothes in the washing machine, that should take care of that.

After working all weekend even if it didn't gain him anything, he deserved a day off, Peter decided. Besides, he was just not in the mood to run around for information he wouldn't get. Things like this needed time. He'd informed certain people and they would report to him if they found out something, anything, and he still had his camera, watching the Argents' house so he wouldn't miss

anything important there either. So Peter grabbed a book and got comfortable in the living room where he had the best light.

Walter left not long after, leaving Peter alone in the big house. Peter loved the noises of his pack, when the house was full and alive, but he enjoyed this as well. The hours in the morning or late at night, when everything was quiet. Peter settled in with his book.

Peter didn't hear from Stiles all day but Stiles had said that much so Peter didn't even try to contact him. When later that day Stiles told him that he was about to head out for dinner with John, Peter just happened to be the last to join his family at the dinner table. He'd stayed back to read Stiles' message and when he looked over to his pack gathered around the table, Peter took a picture and sent it to Stiles before he joined his family.

Only later, when they had moved over to the living room with TV, homework, and talk about baby stuff, it occurred to Peter that Stiles didn't have that. All Stiles had to come home to was an empty cabin and his wet grave at the bottom of the lake. Stiles had never phrased it that way, according to him it was quite nice down there but Peter couldn't see past the fact that Stiles had died there.

Anyway, Stiles didn't have a family or friends aside from John. He must be quite lonely.

Maybe he should introduce him to his family, Peter mused. If he explained who Stiles was, his pack would understand and welcome him with open arms, he had no doubt about that. He only had to look over to where Isaac, Boyd, and Erica were sitting in a corner over their homework. They were not born into their family but that didn't make them any less pack. Not that Peter thought that Stiles would ever agree to become pack but he could be a friend. Someone they liked having around.

The only reason Peter didn't want to tell them was the fact that he was sleeping with Stiles and had no intention to stop. Stiles looked too young and with his history with the pack … it was wrong.

Talia would be the worst, he knew that and without the approval of the alpha, it would be next to impossible to maintain a relationship with Stiles.

But Peter made a mental note to ask Stiles what he thought of the idea of introducing him to the pack. The idea would most likely be dead with that anyway.

Later that day, Talia had just said good night and had gone upstairs, Peter's phone buzzed with a new message.

Derek just got IDed, Stiles wrote with a laughing emoji at the end.

What?

He came to pick me up from John, Stiles explained. *We drove back and got stopped by Parrish*

I know how that feels. Peter had been in the same position just yesterday.

Parrish took him in

Peter stared at his phone. Then he hit the button to call Stiles, he needed to hear this in actual sentences and not just short messages.

Stiles was barely able to tell the story, he was laughing so hard, but in the end, Peter got it out of him.

Stiles and Derek had been on their way back to the lake when Deputy Parrish had stopped them. Basically, what had happened to Peter with that other deputy yesterday, they were not fooling around with that backroad. But then Parrish had recognized Stiles. And had noticed Derek. Since it was the middle of the night, Parrish didn't know Derek and Derek couldn't produce any kind of ID, Parrish had taken him in for identification.

"He can't just take somebody in," Peter said.

"I'm a minor, Derek's an adult," Stiles stated what they must have looked like to Parrish. "It's the middle of the night and we were parking on a remote back road. Derek was lucky that Parrish didn't just shoot him."

He had a point there. From that angle, it looked more than just wrong.

"Why didn't you call John to clear things up?" Peter wondered.

"So that everybody knows that my uncle is okay with me meeting older men in the woods? It's not that we can explain who Derek is." Stiles shot back, still chuckling under his breath. He was having fun with this.

"What's going to happen now?"

"Nothing. The second Derek is alone, he's going to vanish." His shrug was audible in his voice. "I would say that I feel sorry for Parrish for loosing a prisoner like that but after this he deserves it. He wanted to call John or my parents, I had to promise to drive straight home but it took some fast talking."

"John could let him off the hook," Peter offered.

"And admit that he knows the guy who escaped custody?" Stiles snorted. "I just hope that Parrish is not going to tell everybody about me and Derek, that would be awkward."

"Did you tell John?" Peter wondered. "Or are you going to let him go to work blindly?"

"Shot him a message but it looks like he's already sleeping. He should read it in the morning, if not it's his own fault." There was some rustling on the other side of the line, indicating that Stiles got more comfortable on his bed.

"Don't you have to go under?" Peter wondered. He still didn't like the phrase but it was the best way to describe it. Stiles had been on his way back to the lake with Derek after all.

"Derek isn't back yet," Stiles said but it didn't seem to be a problem. "So I decided to bother you instead."

"How nice of you." But Peter had to admit that he was glad that Stiles had decided to bother him. It was a fun story and it did something to Peter that Stiles' first thought had been to tell him. And when had he gotten this sentimental?

They talked for a few minutes longer but then Derek was back and Stiles had to go.

Peter sat there, his phone in hand, still smiling at the idea of Parrish taking in Derek. He would have paid money to see that.

"Who was that?" Suddenly Talia spoke up behind him, startling him.

Peter managed to not drop his phone but it was a close call, he had not noticed her approaching.

"Thought you went to bed." He tried to downplay how much she'd startled him. He should have noticed her but his mind had been elsewhere.

"Heard you talking on the phone." She came over and sat down. She hadn't even changed into something for the night. "Was that Stiles?"

He had told her about Stiles and Derek, she must have caught Derek's name.

"Yes."

"Something happened?"

"Looks like Deputy Parrish has just taken in our local lake monster." Peter couldn't help a smile, this was too funny.

"Is he going to be safe?" Talia was instantly on high alert and ready to rush out of the door.

"Relax, Derek just returned to the lake. Nobody got harmed," Peter assured her. "Except for Parrish's pride when he finds out that he's lost a prisoner."

"You sure?"

"Absolutely." He'd only met Derek a few times but he knew that Derek wouldn't just kill the deputy.

Talia studied him for a little while longer but in the end, she accepted his word on this. Estimating dangers to the pack was his job and she valued his opinion.

"Is it Stiles you're seeing?" She asked out of the blue.

Peter braced his elbows on his thighs.

"What gave it away?" He asked with his head low. He did not want to look his alpha in the eye for this.

"The way you were talking to him just now." She reached over and put a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"I know that I should not be doing this, not with him." He had played all the arguments in his head over and over again.

"He could be a threat," Talia agreed. "He could be using you to get close to the pack to get revenge, have you thought about that?"

"I have."

"And Derek," she continued. "Have you thought about him? What if he doesn't want to share? Stiles is his."

"I know." Peter had thought about all this, how could he not? It was his job to think about things like this. "I've also thought about the possibility that if I disappoint Stiles or break up with him, he could sic Derek on me or the whole pack. I've thought about everything."

"And still." Talia shook her head. "Even if he's not out for revenge, don't you think he's suffered

enough? Do you think it's fair to him to start an affair with him when you know that it won't last? When you know that it will end badly? You're my brother and I love you but you're not a good man."

"I'm a selfish bastard, I know."

She was right and he'd thought about the same thing over and over again. But he'd thought about other things as well, just a few hours ago he'd thought about introducing Stiles to his family so that he wouldn't be so lonely any longer.

"But what if it works out?" Peter asked. "I like him, he likes me. Why not see where this leads?"

Talia studied him for a long moment, a hint of red in her eyes.

"I want to meet him."

Chapter 29

Talia wanted to meet Stiles.

Peter understood where she was coming from, he would have requested the same, but it was still a bad idea. Stiles did not like werewolves in general and the Hale pack in particular, with the exception of Peter for some reason. Stiles had been friendly with Cora but he'd kept his distance. Talia was the alpha, somehow Peter doubted that Stiles would be friendly with her.

If it had been anybody else, Peter would have gotten popcorn and enjoyed the show but here he didn't want to be present for the disaster.

However, Stiles had to agree to meet Talia first.

Not sure how to break it to him, Peter did what he always did when he didn't know how to handle a situation, he gathered information. So on a whim, he drove over to the sheriff's station. He knew that John was home in the evening all week so chances were good to catch him at the station in the morning.

"Hey Nancy," Peter greeted her with a winning smile.

"Didn't expect you." She narrowed her eyes on him. "Did something happen?"

"Just a friendly visit, is the sheriff in?" Peter asked but when he spotted Deputy Parrish in the background, he couldn't help but add: "Heard something did happen here last night."

"Do I even want to know how you know about that already?"

Peter just smiled at her.

"Parrish brought somebody in last night," Nancy told him in a low voice. Low enough that Parrish wouldn't be able to hear but the way he was glancing in their direction he knew exactly what they were talking about. "He didn't want to say why he'd brought him in, just said that he would report to Sheriff Stilinski directly in the morning."

"Isn't that unusual?" Peter asked with a concerned face. "Doesn't he have to write a report or something? Document everything?"

"Usually yes but he said that he wanted to check in with the sheriff first." She made a dramatic pause. "The guy didn't have an ID on him and he wasn't talking. Parrish put him in a holding cell to stew for a few minutes but when he came back, the guy was gone."

"Gone?" Peter faked surprise. "Did he just get up and walked out of the door?"

"We don't know, the cameras malfunctioned. We have Parrish with him in the cell but seconds after he left, the camera in the room just stopped working. Maintenance says something about water damage. But there's no leak or anything."

"How can that be?" Peter played along but he did file away the new piece of information about Derek.

"Nobody knows." She glanced over to the deputy. "Poor Parrish. The sheriff had him in the office for almost half an hour."

Somehow Peter doubted that the vanishing guy had been the main topic there. More the Stiles meeting men older than him in the middle of the night issue.

"Anyway, is he in?"

A minute later Peter poked his head into the sheriff's office.

"Ah, Peter, come in." John motioned for him to take a seat. "What did Stiles do now?" He asked as soon as Peter had closed the door.

"Nothing," Peter assured him. "Heard Parrish made a friend last night?"

John glared at him.

"That poor boy is beating himself up over it." John let out a sigh. "And he's very concerned about Stiles."

"Naturally."

"So." John changed the topic. "What brings you here?"

"I'm kind of looking for advice," Peter admitted. "Talia found out that I'm seeing Stiles."

"Okay? How did she take it?" He asked carefully. "I take that you told her about Stiles and Derek."

"She knows how Stiles ended up with Derek," Peter confirmed. "She's the alpha, she needs to know about things like that in her territory. I didn't tell her that I was seeing Stiles but last night she found out. She's concerned. She wants to meet him."

"The alpha of the Hale pack wants to meet Stiles." John leaned back in his chair with a groan.

"That bad?"

"For sure it's not a good idea."

"Talia insists." Peter spread his fingers to indicate that this was out of his hands. "You know him better than me, how would you break it to him?"

John thought about it for a long moment.

"Don't send him a message that you need to talk," he started. "Stiles is an overthinker, he would just work himself up over that. Call him and just tell him. Or tell him in person, that would be better."

That had been Peter's plan anyway. In the morning he had pondered if he should send Stiles a message like that but for one, Stiles wouldn't have read it anytime soon anyway and second was exactly what John had just pointed out.

"Offer neutral ground," John continued. "He would never agree to this at the Hale house or his cabin. Meet in a coffee shop or over lunch, somewhere public and with food. It calms him down if he has something to chew on."

"Yeah, I noticed that." Peter thought about the poor straws Stiles had molested.

"Don't trap him," John said. "Leave him an escape route."

"So pretty much treat him like he's a spooked animal."

"More like a traumatized person," John corrected with a stern look. "It's been a long time but what happened to him? It still haunts him some days. Meeting your alpha is probably the last thing he wants to do."

Peter left the station deep in thoughts.

It was still early and since he was in town, he checked in with some of his contacts. It kept his mind off other things. He didn't gather any new information, though. Nobody had seen the two hunters and the Argents were just playing nice neighbors. Everything was calm and Peter didn't like it.

He came home in the afternoon along with most of the pack, coming home from school or work. Cora came only in to drop off her bag and freshen up a little before she was out of the door again to meet a friend. The way her gaze kept flickering to Peter, he knew that this wasn't just a friend she hung out with so Talia's "Have fun" became instantly funnier. Cora rolled her eyes at her mother and then she was out of the door.

Talia didn't mention Stiles, there were too many people around and they had agreed to keep Stiles and Derek a secret for now. No need to stir up a panic or to tempt somebody, Peter was thinking of Isaac or Erica, most likely both, to go out to the lake just to see for themselves.

Stiles shot him a message that he was back on the surface again. They still couldn't use John's house, at least not without him hanging around and neither of them wanted that, but Stiles asked if he wanted to come over to the cabin again.

You still owe me, Stiles wrote followed by the emoji of an eggplant and some droplets.

Very mature, Peter answered but this was his best opportunity. So he agreed to come over and asked if he should bring dinner.

"You're seeing him tonight?" Talia asked quietly when he once again got ready to leave before dinner.

"Yes." There was no point denying it. "I'm going to ask him."

She nodded to that, her fingers lingering on his arm for just a moment too long.

"Be careful."

"He's no threat to us," Peter felt the need to say but he understood that she needed to see for herself.

He got the tacos Stiles wanted for dinner before he drove out to the lake. There was no deputy in sight, at least that.

"Should have asked John to tell his deputies to not bother me," Peter muttered to himself when he parked the car. But it looked like not even Stiles was on the not to bother list so why should he be?

Using the path was way quicker than walking through the woods and Peter reached the cabin quicker than he liked. He was not looking forward to the conversation he would have with Stiles.

Stiles greeted him with a kiss and took the bag of food from him to set it out on the small table.

"Derek did make it home?" Peter asked even if he already knew the answer.

"One of his easiest tricks." Stiles waved him off. "Damn, this smells delicious. I'm starving."

They sat down and Stiles had inhaled half his taco before Peter even had unwrapped his.

"Talia wants to meet you," Peter said just to get it over with. He should have waited until Stiles had cleared his mouth and was not in the middle of swallowing, though. Stiles coughed around the bite deep in his throat, his face turning red and Peter seriously wondered if this was a case for Heimlich when Stiles finally managed to cough the bite back up. He spat it into his napkin.

"What?" He asked still coughing.

"She heard me on the phone last night." How he could have been that careless was beyond Peter but he'd been at home, the place where he was supposed to be safe. He'd let his guard down.

"She figured out that it's you I'm seeing."

"Why does she want to meet me?" Stiles took a shallow breath and when that didn't cause another coughing fit, he reached for his glass for a careful sip.

"You're holding a grudge against us," Peter reminded him. "She wants to know if you're a threat."

"You're her left hand and you've already determined that I'm not a threat. Why isn't she listening to you?"

"I might be biased when it comes to you." Peter reached for his taco again.

"Do I have time to think about it?" Stiles asked with a look at the door as if he expected Talia to come in any second now.

"Of course." Peter licked sauce of his thumb. "Sleep over it. And if you say no, she has to accept it." He was not looking forward to telling her that. Talia was not used to people telling her no. "I would like you to meet her but I won't push."

Stiles was now eating way slower, he seemed to have lost his appetite and was chewing mechanically on his taco. He took two more bites before he dropped it entirety and pushed it away.

"Do you want me to leave?" Peter offered. Stiles might want to be alone for a while.

"No." He shook his head. "Please stay."

"Okay."

Peter took his time, eating his food because it looked like Stiles needed a moment to himself. He didn't even make an attempt to fill the silence and that was saying something. Once Peter had finished the taco, he balled up the wrapper and put it back in the bag. There was no garbage truck coming out here so he would take the trash out with him later.

"What do you want to do with the evening?" Peter asked. Sex had been on the table earlier but he doubted that Stiles was in the mood for that.

"Let's watch a movie?" Stiles suggested.

They moved over to the bed, which was missing at least one blanket, Peter noticed.

"One is in the laundry and I had to throw out the other one," Stiles said when Peter mentioned it to him. "You shredded it." He made a clawing motion with his hand.

"I'll replace it," Peter hurried to say but he failed to feel ashamed for ruining one of Stiles' blankets. The blowjob had been more than worth it. He would sacrifice every blanket in the world for another one like that.

"Don't worry about it, blankets are cheap."

They got comfortable with their backs against the wall and their legs stretched out on which Stiles placed his laptop. He refused to watch another Marvel movie like this, apparently one needed a big screen and snacks for that which he was both lacking here. All Stiles had at hand were some Twizzlers but those didn't count.

They settled on a horror movie and then Stiles hit play.

It was a bad horror movie.

They were laughing more than they were scared. Peter couldn't care less for the characters and they were just betting on who of the annoying bunch of dumb teenagers would die next. Sadly two of them survived. They totally didn't deserve it but here they were, coming out of the house with only minor scratches.

"I want a movie where the killer wins," Stiles whined. "This was so dumb. Did you notice …"

And with that Peter was listening to a detailed rundown of all the things that were bad about the movie. He wasn't one to judge, he was joining in rather quickly. Half an hour later they were discussing the biggest plot holes in movie history and Peter had gotten smacked in the face twice by Stiles who was wildly gesticulating while he laid out his argument.

Chapter 30

Stiles did not want to meet Talia. He was not keen on meeting any Hales the least being the alpha. Just no. So his initial reaction was a big fat *nope* with some *fuck-yous* thrown in. But then he glanced over to Peter who was calmly eating his taco. That was the one Hale he liked.

Stiles didn't dare to ask if Talia could tell Peter to not see him again. Did the alpha have that power over the betas? Stiles didn't know and he was not ready for the answer so he didn't ask.

Peter assured him that he didn't have to make a decision now, he could sleep over it, and that they would accept his answer if Talia liked it or not.

The silence over the table became too loud, same for the thoughts circling in his head, he needed distraction.

A stupid horror movie was just the right thing for that and damn was it bad. Stiles dove fully into it, pointing out every plot hole and every stupid thing the teenagers on screen said or did, which were a lot. Peter next to him wasn't much better. He wasn't as vocal but he huffed out a breath here and rolled his eyes there and when those two stupid kids made it out alive in the end, Peter was glaring at the screen as if he wanted to kill them himself.

They were discussing movies long after Stiles had put his laptop away and it was fun. Peter knew most of the movies Stiles mentioned and he made some compelling points about them but eventually, the conversation died down. That was when the thought of meeting Talia crept back into his mind.

It was stupid, Stiles knew that. Talia was not Johnathan and she would not try to hurt him, at least he hoped so. What if this was a trick to lure him in to do whatever with him? Not that they would be able to hold him for long or to actually harm him but it would still suck. And what if Talia didn't like him? If she gave him one look and decided that Peter was too good for him? The what-ifs and maybes started on their little marry-go-round again. Even if they just met up over a coffee Stiles didn't know if he could do that. Not with the alpha of the Hale pack.

He noticed too late how short his breaths were coming out, there was more air going out than coming back in. Stiles felt dizzy, his vision grayed out on the edges and Peter's voice was just a low mumble as if he was underwater again.

"Stiles?" Peter's face came into his view but it was a blurred blob he only identified as Peter because who else could it be. "Hey, it's okay. I'm here, it's okay."

It was not okay but Stiles didn't have the breath to tell him that. Blindly he was searching for something to hold on to and when his fingers wrapped around something, he didn't let go again. Distantly he was aware that it was Peter's arm he was clinging to but he needed something to hold on to or he would just get swept away. He could feel the water on his face, worming its way around the gag into his mouth and he couldn't move. Stiles was sinking like a rock and the water was filling his mouth.

"Stiles."

There was a hand cupping his face and he leaned into it.

When Stiles came to, he was half lying on top of Peter and he was still holding his upper arm in an iron grip.

"You with me again?" Peter asked from somewhere above him, his broad hand stroking up and down Stiles' back. Stiles nodded into his thigh, just taking in one breath after the other. His chest hurt and he got barely enough air into his lungs.

Stiles focused on the next inhale. And the one after that. Eventually, his breaths slowed down to matching Peter's strokes on his back and he could breathe more freely. After long minutes, he was even ready to let go of Peter's arm. His vision was still somewhat blurred but the marks on Peter's arm still stood out.

"That's going to be quite some bruises," Stiles rasped out. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth and he wasn't able to work up enough moisture to get the sandy feeling out of his mouth. But he would have to move to get something to drink and at the moment, that was too much of an effort. He let his head drop back into Peter's lap, who was still calmly stroking his back.

"I didn't have a panic attack in years." Stiles rubbed his cheek against the denim of Peter's jeans to get the tingly feeling off of his skin. "This is the second one since I met you."

"I didn't mean to …" Lost at what he didn't mean to do, Peter fell silent. "How do you feel?"

"Chewed on and spit out." Stiles let out a sigh and his lungs only resisted a little bit. Peter's thigh made a nice pillow and he was not ready to move just yet. Exhaustion took over and he relaxed more into Peter. Stiles felt his eyes dropping but he knew that he wouldn't be able to sleep any time soon. Talia was still lurking in the back of his mind.

"What do you need?" Peter asked. His hand never stopped moving up and down Stiles back and Stiles got the feeling that he would do it the whole night if he told him that that was what he needed. However, it was not what he needed tonight.

"Fuck my lights out." Stiles hadn't even thought in that direction until the words tumbled out of his mouth but that was exactly what he needed. He didn't want to think tonight. And a good orgasm would wash out the chemicals still flooding his brain.

The hand on his back stilled for a moment before Peter was back to the even strokes.

"I'm not sure if that's a good idea," Peter said. "Maybe you should just try to sleep. You're half-asleep already."

"Won't be able to sleep," Stiles told him, his cheek still pressed into Peter's thigh.

Peter seemed to consider it for a moment over which Stiles almost drifted off to sleep. But only almost. There were the claws of his panic still digging into his brain and the second he let his mind drift, they dug in deeper, dragging him back to where the bad dreams were waiting for him. Stiles blinked himself awake again.

"Okay," Peter said quietly. His hand slipped up to Stiles' neck where he started to massage the base of his skull. Stiles felt the tension melting out of him and when Peter manhandled him to lie on his back, he stretched out with a sigh and waited for what Peter would do next.

For now, he was just sitting there, watching Stiles with worried eyes. He didn't look particularly horny.

"If we want to do this one of us has to start moving and that ain't gonna be me," Stiles told him. Even with the missing blankets, his bed was nice and cozy, he was not going to move ever again.

"How do you want to do this?" Peter asked. His hand was back, now moving along the outside of

Stiles' leg and up to his hip.

"That's the right direction." Stiles hummed to the feeling of Peter's hand on his hip. "Can you do slow and gentle? Because I'd like that today. Or are you just all graww?" His voice toppled over the roaring he was trying to achieve here but he got his point across.

"I'm a man of many talents." Peter gave him an amused look. His hand had slipped under Stiles' shirt and his thumb was now stroking his bare skin just above his waistband.

"Words, words, words."

"Oh, I can do so much more than just words." Peter leaned in and brought their lips together in a gentle kiss.

"Show me."

Peter had him panting and all riled up before either of them had even removed one piece of clothing. Peter started slow with kissing and roaming hands but he easily reduced Stiles to a begging mess with his hand under his shirt and his face in Stiles' still denim-clad crotch. Only when Peter had made him come in his pants, he undressed him piece by piece.

Peter admired the view for a moment but then he was back to exploring Stiles' body with his hands and mouth. Stiles arched into the hot mouth torturing his nipple and he was half-hard again by the time Peter started to lap the drying come off Stiles' junk. He sucked Stiles to full hardness again but instead of sucking him off completely, he hooked one of Stiles' legs over his shoulder. Peter had done this before so Stiles thought he knew what was coming next and braced himself for the lube-cold finger but got surprised by the warmth of Peter's tongue.

Stiles keened at that, not able to process what was happening down there. But Peter didn't care about that, he was licking and sucking at his hole, even probing the ring of muscle with the tip of his tongue while he was lazily stroking him. Stiles didn't know if he should push into Peter's hand or mouth, he wanted more of both and at the same time it was too much, the pleasure short-circuiting something in his brain.

"I'm gonna … fuck … Peter … gonna come …" Incoherent words were just falling out of his mouth but then he went rigid and he spilled his release all over Peter's hand while he felt his muscles flutter around where Peter was tongue fucking him.

Spent Stiles collapsed back into the pile of blankets.

"Damn, Peter," he slurred. His whole body was still thrumming with the sensory overload and he might be able to go to sleep now.

However, Peter wasn't done with him. Gently he rolled him onto his stomach and spread his legs.

Stiles wanted to protest, it was too much, he couldn't take more but then there was a finger slowly fucking in and out of him. It felt nice. And as long as Peter didn't touch his junk again, Stiles was fine with this. He pillowed his head on his arms and let Peter do whatever he wanted down there.

Eventually, Peter replaced his fingers with his cock but by then Stiles was loose enough that it slipped in without much resistance.

Stiles fell asleep with Peter slowly fucking in and out of him.

He woke up in Peter's arms.

"Could get used to this." Stiles stretched. His body arched in a good way, Peter had put him through the wringer last night, and he was still pliant and relaxed. Stiles snuggled deeper under the blanket to enjoy this feeling for a little while longer.

"How often did you make me come, anyway?" Stiles wondered. Peter had kept him on the edge for what had felt like hours. To be fair, he'd done the same to Peter when he'd blown him the other day.

"Three times but I think you were asleep for the last one." Peter drew him close until Stiles was the little spoon with Peter's warm body firmly in his back.

Stiles sighed happily, he really could get used to this.

They got up eventually. Stiles a little slower and moving around more stiffly than Peter, though.

Stiles jumped into the lake for a second to wash off the last traces of come and sweat and the lube that was squishing between his cheeks.

He came back inside naked and still dripping wet.

"Don't ever do that," he warned Peter who had used the time to get a fire going in the stove. Stiles stood in front of it for a second to let the warmth seep into his body before he got dressed.

"Do what?"

"Go out into the lake," Stiles told him while he was searching for his clothes. "It doesn't matter that Derek knows you or that I like you, he would drown you. There hasn't been anybody coming here in a long time, he wouldn't be able to pass you up." Stiles had found his socks but now he looked up to look Peter straight in the eye. "It's in his nature. He's not going to go out there, just randomly killing people but the next person going for a swim here? Not a chance."

"I wasn't planning on going on a swim," Peter assured him.

"Good."

Stiles got dressed and then he made breakfast. Just the same stuff he'd made the other day, maybe he should stock up on some things.

After breakfast, Peter left and Stiles promised to think about the thing with Talia.

Stiles waited until he was sure that Peter wasn't coming back for whatever reason, then he stripped out of his clothes and dove into the lake. He sank to the bottom, into Derek's open arms. Here he didn't have to think.

Chapter 31

Peter went home after breakfast with Stiles and just like the other day, the only person still in the house was Walter, reading the newspaper in the kitchen.

Peter fixed himself a cup of coffee and when he turned around, he found the part of the newspaper Walter was done with already waiting for him at his place.

"Thanks." Peter sat down to have a look.

"You don't look like you've been camping out in the woods all night," Walter observed. "That friend of yours Talia won't shut up about?"

"Why is everybody so interested in what I'm doing?" Peter asked into his coffee. Over the rim, he was scanning the headlines but nothing caught his eye.

"Because you haven't been seeing anyone since Olivia." Walter had no qualms, saying her name and that stung less than the dancing around the topic most of the others did. "And you won't tell who you're seeing."

"I'm just messing with my big sister."

Walter gave him an unimpressed look.

"Michael left a list for you." Walter changed the topic and pointed at a note on the counter. "Christina might have added some things as well."

Peter glanced over to the note but didn't get up to read it just yet. It was not uncommon. He was the one without a nine to five and he got around town quite a lot anyway, people liked to throw errands at him. Peter didn't mind, it gave him an excuse to check in with his contacts.

"Is it really a guy you're seeing?" Walter did come back to the initial topic after a long minute over which Peter had just been enjoying his coffee.

"Yes," Peter answered, eyes on the newspaper. "Is there a problem with that?"

"No, not at all," Walter hurried to say. "But I'm about to become a grandfather. Michael has found a wonderful wife and they're about to start a family. We're going to have a baby in the house."

"Yeah, looking forward to the sleepless nights," Peter said, sarcasm dripping off his words. A baby was capable of keeping any human up at night, it was worse for werewolves. He liked babies, they were adorable but they were also weapons of mass destruction when it came to eardrums.

"Makes you think," Walter continued, now a dreamy smile on his lips, picturing the happy little family, no doubt. "You and Olivia had plans too."

That did sting.

"That was a long time ago," Peter said briskly. "Things changed." Mainly that Olivia had died.

Walter hummed to that.

Peter finished his coffee and then stood to have a look at the list.

He and Olivia did have plans and he had his suspicions that Olivia had wanted to tell him a sweet little secret. Peter had noticed some changes in her scent but at that time he hadn't been sure. But then it hadn't mattered any longer. Olivia was gone.

Peter took a breath and read the list.

Michael wanted him to pick something up from the dry cleaner and he needed a few things from the hardware store, they were in the middle of setting up the nursery. Two simple requests. But the list didn't end there. The handwriting changed, the next items came from Christina. Partly it was a grocery list but she also wanted him to pick up a few things, sending him around town because the bookstore was nowhere near the post office, and the crafts store Christina was raiding lately for her various baby projects was at the other end of town.

"Seriously?" Peter asked and behind him, Walter just chuckled.

"You don't want to upset the pregnant woman, do you?" He asked. "Maybe your friend can help you."

Peter wouldn't ask Stiles to help him with this but he was most likely under anyway. It was almost scary how quickly Peter had gotten used to the fact that that was something Stiles did. There were not fix times but most days Stiles spent hours at the bottom of the lake.

"Na, I got this." Peter put the list back on the counter, first he needed a shower and fresh clothes. Walter might not notice but he was reeking for Stiles and sex and he didn't want the whole pack on his back again.

An hour later Peter went out to run some errands.

It took him longer than expected but he got some information along the way as well so the day was not completely wasted. At the hardware store, Peter had a little chat with one of the employees and he found out that the hunters had been there a few times by now. Peter put some bills more on the counter and he walked out of the store with the screws for Michael and a list of the things the hunters had bought.

At least one of the hunters had been at the bookstore as well. He'd left a memorable impression with a lewd remark he'd made towards one of the female workers and the fact that he'd bought a High School chemistry book.

"Didn't look like the kind of guy who would buy school books for his kids. And it's the middle of the school year."

When Peter showed her the pictures of the hunters, she confirmed that it had been the guy Stiles had seen at the mall the other day. Looked like that was their errand guy.

When Peter came home in the afternoon, he just wanted to drop off the things he'd bought and retreat to his research or maybe a nap but he got roped into helping Michael and Christina in the nursery and was only saved when Pamela came in to tell them that dinner would be ready in ten.

After dinner, they moved over to the living room where everybody was enjoying the company of the pack while they were doing their own thing. The kids were doing their homework, Deborah was helping Emily with hers, there were quiet conversations, the TV was running, and some were entertaining themselves on their phone. Peter took his out as well but he hadn't gotten a message from Stiles all day.

Peter sent him a message, asking how his day was. The checkmark turned blue only a second later

so Stiles had read it but he didn't answer. Peter put the phone away, Stiles would answer when he was ready. If anything Stiles had time. The one who didn't have time, or patience for that matter, was Talia. Over the evening she was throwing glances in his direction but she only could talk to him freely once everybody else had turned in for the night.

"Did you ask him?" She asked a few minutes after Anthony and Deborah had said their goodnights.

"I did," Peter confirmed. The image of Stiles flashed up in his mind. This eyes big and scared while he'd been gasping for air but hadn't been able to take an actual breath.

It had scared him and Peter did not want to see him like that ever again. He'd helplessly watched while Stiles had worked himself into a full-blown panic attack and he hadn't known what to do. Just because he'd asked if Stiles was willing to meet Talia. Usually, Stiles was self-confident and cocky but that one little question had thrown him off completely.

"What did he say?" Talia asked when he failed to say more.

"He doesn't like the idea but he hasn't said no." Peter leaned back in his chair. "He wants to sleep over it. Haven't heard from him all day."

"Oh," she made. "I'm not going to bite his head off, he knows that, right? But I need to know that he's not a threat to the pack, you of all people should know that."

"I already know that he isn't a threat," Peter said coldly. "Stiles had nothing to do with werewolves, he didn't even know we exist before he got jumped, abducted, gagged and bound by us. Then the alpha himself tossed him into the lake and let him drown. Sacrificed him to Derek."

She gasped, shocked by his blunt words.

"How did you expect him to react when an alpha asks to meet him?"

She didn't have an answer to that.

"He's thinking about it, that's all we can ask of him," Peter continued. "It is quite possible that he doesn't want to see you. If he says no, you won't see him. You will not go after him and you will not corner him. If he says no, you will respect that."

"I'm your alpha," Talia told him, her eyes hard but there was no red in them.

"And you're a good alpha," Peter agreed. "That's why you won't force him into something he'd explicitly said he doesn't want, right? Or should I nap him off the street and tie him up for your convenience? Because that's exactly what Johnathan has done to him. And while we're at it, we can throw him in the lake. Just for good measure." He was gritting out the words, his clawed hands leaving marks on the armrest of the chair and he just knew that his eyes were glowing blue when he glared at her.

"Anyway, he hasn't decided yet." Peter stood and hurried past her. He needed fresh air.

Usually, he didn't go far, just a quick round around the house to get a feeling for the night and to make sure that they were safe but tonight he needed to move. Peter broke into a run.

When he came back to the house an hour later, the lights were out and Talia had gone to bed.

Peter checked the doors and windows as usual before he went upstairs to get ready for bed as well. He was brushing his teeth, mind already numb and more than ready for sleep, when behind him

the shower started to drip.

On high alert, Peter swirled around and stood face to face with Derek.

Peter took a step back until his butt hit the sink.

"What do you want?" He asked, his mouth foamy and he still had the toothbrush in hand. He dropped it to have both hands free but he knew that he didn't stand a chance against Derek. They had been here before. Would Derek drown him for real tonight?

"What does your alpha want from Stiles?" Derek asked but made no attempt to close the gap between them. He just stood there, waiting for an answer.

Peter opened his mouth to answer but then a noise caught his attention. The bathroom was surrounded by bedrooms. He couldn't exactly pinpoint where the noises were coming from but there was somebody moving around.

"Can we talk somewhere else?" Peter asked. Derek had given Stiles five more minutes, maybe he was willing to give him the same.

Derek considered it but then he nodded.

"You have a faucet at your shed, meet me there." With that, he was gone.

Peter let out a breath of relief which made him blowing raspberries with the foam. He hurried to rinse his mouth and then, as quietly as possible, he left the bathroom. Now he was able to pinpoint the noises, looked like Boyd and Erica were busy with something else than sleeping. They most likely wouldn't have heard his conversation with Derek but after Talia eavesdropping on him just the other day, Peter didn't want to risk it.

Derek was already waiting for him by the shed. He was standing on the side facing away from the house so he'd gotten the point.

"What does your alpha want from Stiles?" Derek repeated his question when Peter approached him.

"Mainly she wants to determine if he's a threat to the pack," Peter answered. "He is holding a grudge against us, rightfully so, and she wants to know if he's going to act on it. Maybe he's using me to get close to her and the rest of the pack."

Derek was watching him closely which made Peter wonder if he was able to tell if he was lying or not. Which didn't concern him because for once he was completely honest.

"And the not main reason?" Derek prompted.

Peter put his hands in his pockets and leaned his back against the shed. That part was more difficult.

"Another reason is that she's my big sister and she wants to know who I'm involved with." Did Derek know that they had sex a few times now? Peter was pretty sure that Derek was aware of the times he'd spent the night in Stiles' cabin but he couldn't help but wonder if Derek knew the details. If he even cared about earthly things like that.

"But she's also worried about Stiles," Peter finally admitted. "I'm not exactly the best person to have a relationship with."

"Neither is Stiles."

Chapter 32

Peter did not get drowned that night.

After Derek had left, Peter closed the dripping faucet before he went back into the house, deep in thoughts. Derek was worried about Stiles, he got that, but the fact alone that he'd showed up made it clear that Stiles hadn't said no, yet, he was still thinking about meeting Talia.

In the morning Peter found a message from Stiles waiting for him.

We need to talk. Coffee?

Stiles had sent the message at four in the morning so when he replied Peter didn't expect an immediate answer but Stiles was typing just a second later.

Peter had asked when and where to which Stiles answered: *Now?*

Quickly followed by: *Or did you have breakfast already?*

We can do this later

Up to you

Peter read the incoming messages with an amused smile and answered that now was fine.

When he came downstairs, most of the pack was gathered around the table, the smell of fresh coffee filled the air while everybody was trying to get awake enough for the day. Erica was sleeping with her head on the table, though. Peter wished them all a good morning but when Talia reached for the pot of coffee to fill a cup for him, he stopped her.

"Sorry, but I'm seeing someone for breakfast."

"Aww." Deborah made while Isaac was making kissing noises at him. The more mature ones at the table just told him to have fun and went back to their breakfast. Talia refused to meet his eye but he knew that she was holding her breath for Stiles' decision.

"Text me," she said.

"Of course." And with that Peter left.

Stiles had suggested a diner which according to him had the best pancakes in town. Peter had been there a few times so he knew that Stiles was right but he'd still hesitated to confirm the location. Erica worked there. She would be only in after school so she wouldn't be serving them but he feared that word would get around to her. He was her uncle, kind of, everybody at the diner knew that.

But Stiles wanted pancakes and Peter didn't want to make this more difficult for him than it already was so he'd agreed.

The morning rush was in full high, everybody wanted coffee on their way to work and the ones with more time had pancakes for breakfast. When Peter entered the diner, he didn't spot one empty table but he didn't spot Stiles either. Maybe he was running late. Peter had no doubt that Stiles wanted to tell him his decision and however he'd decided, he might be dreading the moment he'd have to tell Peter.

"Peter."

Peter turned around, scanning the crowd for a familiar face.

"Over here," Stiles said in a normal voice that would have gotten lost in the noises all around him but it was easy to pick up for Peter. And Stiles didn't have to yell like an idiot to get his attention.

Stiles had gotten himself a table and was already half-way through his first coffee when Peter joined him. At least Peter hoped it was his first coffee. The way Stiles was fidgeting and how he'd already plucked apart a napkin it could very well be his third.

"Morning," Peter greeted him which got him a tired look. Stiles had bags under his eyes, Peter doubted that he'd gotten much sleep last night.

"I need pancakes first," Stiles said before Peter could say anything else.

So they sat in silence, Stiles still ripping apart the poor napkin, until their waitress found her way over to them. She poured Peter a coffee and refilled Stiles' cup before she took their orders. Peter went for a short stack but Stiles had the double with extra butter and two kinds of syrup.

"You're going to die from a caffeine-sugar overdose," Peter predicted darkly but Stiles just waved him off.

"Even if I could die from that, it would take way more to kill a person with caffeine than this." He held up his cup. "I've read online about people who ordered drinks with an insane amount of extra shots of espresso but not one where somebody's heart gave out because of it." He threw him a half-hearted smile. "You should ask Erica, bet she has some stories to tell."

"So you know that she works here." That was interesting but not surprising. "Why did you still want to meet here?"

"Like I said, best pancakes in town."

Right on cue, their waitress set their plates on the table. Peter's looked reasonable and he still knew that he would have to fight with the last bites but that he would eat them anyway, the pancakes were that good and totally worth a little stomach ache, but Stiles' plate was just ridiculous.

"Can you even look over that?" Peter asked to witch Stiles straightened up. The stack of pancakes still went up to his chest. Stiles just grinned and reached for his fork.

They ate in silence for a while, Stiles was just shoveling the pancakes into his mouth with butter and syrup glistering on his lips. After a while, Stiles slowed down, the worst of his hunger taken care of.

Peter washed down a piece of pancake with a sip of coffee before he asked: "Have you thought about it?"

He didn't need to elaborate on what he was talking about, there was only one topic hanging over them.

"Yeah." Stiles made and pushed a chunk of pancake around his plate to pick up the syrup. The piece was already soaked and soggy but he pushed it around even more. "If this thing with you goes on I'll have to deal with your pack rather sooner than later. Your kind never comes alone, there's always more people attached to you."

Peter hadn't thought about that, his mind had been more on Talia and what she might do but Stiles had a point here.

"So it comes down to the question if I want to continue this thing with you or not." Stiles let out a sigh and put his fork down.

"Are you breaking up with me?" Peter hadn't expected their conversation to go in that direction. He didn't want to end whatever he had with Stiles and for sure not like this or for this reason. On the outside, he stayed calm but on the inside, he was cursing Talia for forcing Stiles to make a decision like this.

"No." Stiles shook his head. "I like what we're doing. I like you." He paused. "And we still have quite some movies to watch," he added with a little smile but that was gone quickly.

"Same for me," Peter told him to make clear that they were on the same page here.

"So, sooner or later I will have to meet your alpha," Stiles concluded. "And I'd rather do that on my terms and not when she ambushes me in the dairy aisle or something."

"What are your terms?"

Turned out that Stiles had thought about this a lot. He set a time and a place. He wanted to meet Talia for lunch and Peter knew the place he was suggesting. It had an open floor, the tables not too close together, and it had a back door right next to the restrooms. Good choice.

Stiles had picked the upcoming Saturday. If to give himself time to steel up for the conversation or to give Talia time to rearrange stuff to make time for him, Peter did not know. Maybe a little bit of both.

"You and Talia, nobody else of your pack," Stiles demanded next which was still very reasonable.

"She and I are the only ones who even know about you," Peter assured him. Sure, the whole pack knew that he was seeing someone but aside from Talia only Cora knew a name and could put a face to it but Cora still didn't know about Stiles' background.

"And I'm going to bring Derek."

"Why?" Peter asked. Stiles' other demands, he'd expected or even would have suggested himself, but bringing Derek was something else.

"I'm not going to face her alone," Stiles said, his expression stony. "Sorry, you don't count. You'll be on her side. You're her beta and her left hand, on that day you won't be on my side." He seemed sad about that fact but it warmed Peter's heart that he counted him on his side the rest of the time.

"It would be two against one and that's not fair. So, Derek."

"That's not what she wants." Peter picked up his fork again.

"Too bad, it's what she's going to get." Stiles followed suit and stuffed that soggy bit of pancake into his mouth.

Peter had met Derek a few times now and at first, he'd been the scary lake creature he was supposed to be but by now Peter had seen glimpses of his softer side. Stiles was calling him a friend and especially after his encounter with Derek last night, Peter was starting to see that.

"Talia is going to throw a fit," Peter said.

"And you're looking forward to it, you can't fool me."

Peter didn't deny that.

With that out of the way, they moved on to other topics while they were slowly eating their way through their pancakes. Looked like John had been right, Stiles needed something to chew on when he was stressed but now with that off his chest, it became clear that he was not only a stress eater. Stiles was a relief eater as well. He did clear his plate.

Peter asked if Stiles had plans for the day but he shook his head.

"I better get back out to the lake before people start to wonder why I'm not in school," he said with a look around. The morning rush was dying down and there were only a few people left. There was no other teenager in sight. "But I'll text you. If John's schedule doesn't change, I have the house for myself on Friday. How about another movie night?"

Peter agreed easily to that and then he watched Stiles leaving in that beat-up jeep of his.

Like promised, Peter texted Talia that Stiles had agreed to meet her and that they would talk later. Later turned out to be close to midnight when everybody else had turned in for the night.

"So, what did he say?" Talia asked once the house had quieted down and they were alone in the living room.

"He's willing to meet you but under his conditions."

Like excepted she was fine with most of Stiles' conditions. She would have to toggle another appointment she had on Saturday but that shouldn't be a problem.

"And Derek is going to be there as well." Peter let the cat out of the bag.

"Wait what? No! We can't bring him somewhere with people," Talia hissed. "What if he ...," she started but ended the sentence with a vague gesture.

"What if he what?" Peter asked. "He's not going to just kill random people."

"He's a creature."

"So are we."

She didn't know what to say to that.

"He's not unreasonable." Peter tried to placate her. "He's worried about Stiles."

"You don't know that."

"Actually, I do. He was here last night." Peter leaned back in his seat. He was enjoying this maybe a bit too much.

"He was what?" Now red bled into her eyes. "Why didn't you alarm us?"

"He appeared in the bathroom upstairs." The one that was close to several bedrooms, hers included.

"Did he threaten you? What did he want?"

"He wanted to know what your intentions with Stiles are," Peter answered truthfully. "May I remind you, he could have come for you directly. He could have threatened or killed you but he came to me and you know why?"

She was still trying to wrap her head around the fact that somebody had broken into their house, their den, last night without anybody noticing.

"Because he knows me. He knows that I care for Stiles. That's why he came to me and simply asked instead of threatening you."

"Is there a way to keep him out?" She asked, ignoring the rest for now. "What if he comes back? What if he comes for somebody else? For Emily?"

"He comes through the pipes." Peter shook his head. "As I see it, he can get wherever he wants. If you're near a faucet, he can get to you."

"There has to be a way to keep him out."

"There probably is," Peter agreed. "But so far I haven't figured out what exactly he is and without that information …" He spread his hands. There were a few herbs and runes but the house was already fortified with most of them. "And if we were able to keep him out of the house, would you just never go near a faucet anywhere ever again?"

"We should get rid of him." She growled.

"He's been quietly living next door without us even noticing for decades," Peter reminded her. In the beginning, he'd thought the same. Get rid of the potential threat before it could become an actual threat but now he was thinking differently. "Just talk to them."

Chapter 33

They did have a movie night on Friday but before they got to the movie part Peter wanted to show him that Greek place he'd talked about the other day.

They agreed that Peter would pick him up at the lake, that way Stiles wouldn't have to worry about being stranded at the lake later with his car still in John's driveway.

With dinner first and movie later they wouldn't have much time for anything else before Stiles' time would be up. They would have to go for fast and dirty if they wanted to have sex before Derek showed up to bring him home but that was exactly what Stiles wanted tonight. It would help him to get the thoughts out of his head.

The restaurant was kind of fancy with a candle on the table and the napkin was actual cloth and not just paper. Stiles felt out of place but Peter seemed to be right at home.

"Relax," Peter gave him an easy smile to which Stiles fought the urge to flip him off. It did help to ease his mood, though.

The waiter offered Peter wine but since Stiles didn't have an ID telling that he was old enough to have a glass as well, Peter declined and just went with water.

"What happened to red wine to the Greek food?" Stiles teased but appreciated the gesture.

They had a three-course dinner and Stiles didn't know what he was eating but damn, it was good. He wanted to lick his plate.

They left the restaurant full and satisfied in a way only good food could archive.

Over at John's, everything was prepared for their movie night. Stiles suspected that it was some kind of dad thing, John was seeing a kind of son in him after all, but it might just be practical thinking. With the snacks, drinks, and everything already laid out, they didn't have to waste time with that and could start the movie right away.

The fact that he would meet Talia tomorrow had been constantly on the back of Stiles' mind, even over dinner when Peter had done his best to distract him with fun little anecdotes, but now he allowed himself to dive into the movie.

Most of the time he was studying Peter more than he was looking at the screen but he didn't need the visual to comment on what was happening. This was more about Peter than the movie anyway.

Like the other times, they talked about it afterward. Stiles wanted to know if Peter had enjoyed it and now with three movies under his belt, Peter was able to talk more about the Marvel universe as a whole, bringing in details from the previous movies to analyze this one.

Stiles had fun and he could talk about this for hours but a glance at the time told him that he didn't have hours.

"We have less than an hour," he pointed out. "And I want your dick up my ass before I have to leave."

"That's rather blunt."

"I don't have time for pleasantries." Stiles took the bowl of chips out of Peter's hand. Once that was at a safe distance on the table, he swung his leg over Peter's thighs to straddle him.

"I want to ride you, right here on the couch." Stiles ground his hips into Peter who was just sitting there, leaning against the back of the couch. He was looking up at Stiles with an amused expression.

"Do you now?" He raised an eyebrow at Stiles, a smile tugging at his lips.

"I do." Stiles ran his hands over Peter's neck and shoulder to get him on board with the idea. "And I warn you, I don't care if Derek shows up while I'm still riding you. So if you're not into exhibitionism, we should get on with the program."

"Would he wait until you're finished?" Peter had the gall to asked for which Stiles slapped him on the shoulder.

They did finish before Derek showed up but barely.

Stiles was still panting into Peter's shoulder, his ass out in the open and he was pretty sure that he was leaking come when Derek spoke up behind him. He must have a good view on everything but at the moment Stiles couldn't care less.

"Stiles," Derek said and if he was fazed by what he was seeing he didn't let it show.

"Just give me a moment," Stiles mumbled into the skin of Peter's neck. "Can you wait in the kitchen?" He didn't lift his head to confirm that Derek actually left the room.

"I think you're the one with the exhibitionism kink," Peter observed. They had pushed down Peter's pants just far enough to get his cock free, Stiles doubted that Derek had seen any dangling bits from him but he wasn't so sure about himself.

"Derek doesn't count." He didn't want to but Stiles pushed himself into a more upright position. "Better get cleaned up before he loses patience."

With only one leg in his pants, he waddled over to the bathroom to clean up and when he came back to the living room, he found Peter sitting on the couch with Derek in one of the chairs, talking quietly to each other.

"What's up?" Stiles asked and flopped down next to Peter. "You two becoming friends?"

Stiles had the suspicion that they had been talking about him but now the conversation had stopped.

"Time to leave." Derek stood and Stiles followed with a sigh.

"Let me see Peter out real quick."

Peter followed him to the door and didn't even hesitate to turn his back on Derek. That fact alone put a grin on Stiles' face.

"Sorry for the rude kick-out." Stiles took Peter's hand in his, playing with his fingers. He was not ready to let him go just yet but behind him, he felt Derek hovering.

"Don't worry," Peter assured him. "I'll come over to your cabin next time and we'll have all the time in the world."

"I'd like that." He wanted to say more but in the end, he just settled for: "See you tomorrow."

He kissed Peter on the corner of the mouth and then Peter left.

Stiles stood at the closed door for a second longer before he turned around to face Derek.

"You!" He pointed with his finger at him. "You were totally staring at my ass."

Derek didn't say anything to that, he just stood there in the dimly lit hallway, his face in the shadows.

"Stop just standing there, you look like the killer in a horror movie." Stiles pushed past him. "Help me clean up, I don't want John to get a heart-attack when he comes home."

They cleaned up and then Derek whisked them away through the kitchen sink.

At the lake, Stiles didn't come up again and he was tempted to just stay at the bottom of the lake for a while, maybe for a decade or two, just to not face Talia.

He'd seen pictures of her. She looked like a nice person and if he believed what people were saying about the Hale family, she was a good alpha under which the pack thrived. Not that the people in town used terms like *pack* and *alpha* but it was clear that Talia was well-liked and people thought highly of her.

Stiles still didn't want to meet her.

However, he did come to the surface and got dressed in time for lunch with her. When he was ready to leave, Derek came out of the water as well and Stiles drove them over to the place they would use for this.

Stiles had decided on a late lunch to miss the usual rush and when he and Derek entered the place, it was almost empty. There were only a few other patrons and most of the tables were empty. They were a bit early, Peter and Talia were not here yet just like Stiles had hoped.

"Over there." Stiles pointed at a table near the restrooms where he knew that there was a back door.

However, with Derek around his escape route would be straight to the restroom. Not even a big bad alpha could follow them through the pipes. They took their seats with their backs to the wall, Stiles wanted to spot them early. Derek squished himself more into the corner in hope that nobody would notice the growing puddle under his chair. From a little distance, his clothes just looked like they were of a darker color and not wet. The hair plastered to his skull could still be wet from a shower and if anybody noticed his damp skin, they hopefully would assume that he was just sweating for whatever reason. They didn't have to like what they saw, Stiles just wanted Derek to pass as human.

The waitress came over but Stiles informed her that they were waiting for the others. He did order a coke for himself, with a straw, and water for Derek, though.

Derek could and would eat but he didn't need to and there wasn't much he enjoyed. Water was the best option for him. When their drinks arrived, Stiles instantly picked up the straw and took one end between his teeth.

Then Peter and Talia entered the diner. Stiles had only ever seen pictures of her but there was no mistaking who the woman next to Peter was. Her eyes zoned in on Stiles and Derek when she stiffly walked over to them.

Stiles hurried to let go of the straw.

"You must be Stiles." She gave him a nod. "I'm Talia."

"Nice to meet you." Stiles felt himself say. He was lucky that he was already sitting, he doubted, that his legs would hold him right now.

"And you must be Derek." She smiled at him before she took the seat across from Stiles while Peter sat down opposite to Derek.

"Have you ordered yet?" Talia asked, reaching for the menu.

"We were waiting for you," Stiles said and picked up a menu as well. Not that he felt hungry. More like throwing up. The alpha of the Hale pack was sitting across from him.

Under the table, Derek put a hand on his knee. It was cold and Stiles felt the dampness seeping through his jeans but it did help.

They ordered their food and then they were just sitting there, trying to not stare too openly at each other. It took only a minute before Stiles succumbed and reached for the straw again.

"So you wanted to see me," he said around the plastic in his mouth. For a second he felt like a cowboy in one of those old western movies when smoking on screen had still been a thing. One of them should say that this town wasn't big enough for both of them. Except that it was, Derek and the Hale pack had come to that agreement a long time ago.

"Here I am." Stiles spread his arms, almost knocking over his coke. "What do you want?"

"What do you want?" Talia countered.

"Me?" Bewildered Stiles looked from Derek to Peter to check that he was hearing right here before he looked back at Talia. "I was just minding my own business when he …" he pointed at Peter, "tried to leave his trash at my door. Which he broke."

"And fixed," Peter piped up. Judging by his expression he was having fun.

"You." Stiles' attention was back on Talia. "You and your p...people came into my life. You were the ones who didn't know which side of the town they belong to." Stiles felt his face heaten up with his rage but at least he was past his anxiety now.

"Speaking of which." Talia turned to Derek. "I take that my ancestor came to an agreement with you?"

"That is right."

"What exactly did you and Johnathan Hale agree on?"

"I allowed Johnathan Hale and his pack to stay here and in return, he promised to keep his distance and to keep people away from the lake," Derek answered. "To seal the deal, he had to give me one of his pack members."

"But he didn't." Talia's eyes flickered back to Stiles but she never let Derek out of her sight. "He gave you someone else instead."

"That is correct." Derek met her gaze openly.

"So you didn't get what Johnathan has promised you and you …" She turned back to Stiles. "You're the poor guy Johnathan sacrificed instead." She paused, keeping a close eye on both of them. "Why should I trust you?"

Chapter 34

Peter was here on behalf of his alpha. His job was to keep his mouth shut and to look intimidating while Talia did the talking. But if he was honest, he was more on Stiles' side in this. So when Talia asked why she should trust them, Peter opened his mouth to tell her a thing or two about that but he got interrupted by Stiles who barked out a bitter laugh.

"You're asking why you should trust us? Seriously? You betrayed us." Stiles fixed her with a cold glare. "From my point of view, your pack doesn't honor contracts and is willing to just kill a random person for their benefit. So why in hell should I trust you?"

Taken aback Talia didn't know what to say.

"But yeah, I get why you might think that we're out for revenge," Stiles added after a moment.

They were saved by their food arriving. Nobody spoke while the waitress set down the plates and at least Stiles dug immediately into his food, looked like John had been right about the food thing.

"I came to an agreement with Johnathan Hale," Derek spoke up when they were alone again. "To keep the truce between us, I'm willing to do the same with you."

"What are you thinking of?" Talia asked but at least she was listening.

"You and your pack can stay and I won't interfere with you," Derek stated. "In exchange, you will stay away from my lake."

"Except for Peter," Stiles piped up. "He has a standing invitation. He can come to the lake whenever he wants. Which will be quite often, I hope." He winked at Peter who just rolled his eyes at him.

"You still owe me a member of your pack," Derek continued. "But I won't insist on that. At least for now." His eyes had a dark glint to them now. "But if you betray me or Stiles again or if you try to harm us, I will insist."

"What would happen to Stiles?" Peter couldn't help but wonder. "If you take one of us? Just hypothetically."

Would Stiles be free? Would he die? Or would nothing change at all? Peter had thought about this before, here was his chance for a real answer.

"Nothing would happen to him," Derek answered. "Stiles is mine, nothing is going to change that. But I can keep more than one person if I want."

He turned back to Talia.

"Will you accept?" He held out his hand and not only Peter was holding his breath for Talia's reaction.

"I accept," she said after a long moment and shook his hand.

With that out of the way, they turned their attention to the food in front of them but at least Peter was not particularly hungry.

Talia tried to ask Stiles questions about his life, about his relationship with John, and of course

about his intentions with Peter. It felt more like an interrogation than an attempt to make some small talk and Stiles didn't take it well. He gave clipped answers if he answered at all and otherwise he was eating his sandwich with angry determination. By now he'd eaten half of his straw as well.

However, they parted on civilized terms with the agreement to not kill each other.

"So, what do you think?" Peter asked when he was back in the car with Talia. They had been the first to leave because Stiles had been unwilling to turn his back on the alpha. At least Talia had understood the hint and had made the first move.

"Stiles is afraid of me." Talia let out a sigh.

"And that surprises you why?" Peter asked. He would have glared at her but he kind of had to keep his eyes on the street. "He only agreed to see you because he doesn't want to end what he has with me. He had a fucking panic attack when I asked him. And the first thing you do is attack him. You're supposed to be the diplomatic one."

"I know." She looked out of the window. "You didn't tell me he had a panic attack."

"And that would have made a difference?"

She didn't say anything to that and just kept looking out of the window.

"I don't think he's a threat," she finally admitted. "And neither is Derek. At least not as long as we leave him alone."

Out of the corner of his eye, Peter caught her nibbling at the nail of her thumb. As a kid, she'd always been a nail biter but as an adult, she had it under control. Most of the time.

"He's not what I expected."

"Stiles or Derek?"

"Both." She let go of her thumb and placed her hands in her lap. "Derek, he's clearly not human but he's not the monster I expected. He's protective of Stiles." She fell silent for a moment. "And I got the impression that he just wants to be left alone. That he doesn't care what's going on in town as long as we stay away from his lake."

"Yeah." Peter had been surprised by Derek as well. He could be the scary monster he was ought to be, their first encounter in the bathroom came to mind and thinking about it, Peter could almost taste the lake water forcing its way into his airways, but most of the time Derek chose to not be like that.

"And Stiles," Talia continued. "He's so young."

"He's older than the both of us combined," Peter repeated what John had said to him the other day. "He's mature, kind of. He doesn't have the mind of a teenager. Don't worry, I'm not interested in him because of how he looks."

He admired Stiles' lean body and his smooth skin, he liked the moles and the upturned nose but that was not why he wanted to have more of Stiles. Stiles was sassy and sarcastic and he could be an asshole. He had a sharp mind, Peter liked that. He could have a conversation with Stiles and not feel like he was getting dumber by the minute. Not many had that talent.

"You like him," Talia said as if she'd realized that just now. Peter couldn't blame her. Since Olivia, he hadn't been serious with anybody. Before he'd met Stiles he would have said that he wasn't even capable of being with somebody ever again. He'd gotten used to being alone and independent but with Stiles, he would never have a normal relationship anyway.

Peter wasn't even sure what a long term relationship with Stiles would look like but he was more than willing to just live in the moment for now and see where things went.

"Stiles didn't seem bothered when Derek said that he's his and that nothing can change that," Talia continued. "I can't even imagine …"

"Me neither." He hadn't even told her about the very short amount of time Stiles could stay away from the lake. Peter couldn't imagine living like that. What kind of purpose did a life like that even have? Stiles was facing eternity and what was he doing? Reading books and watching movies.

At least that was what he was doing now. Peter had no idea what he'd done a decade ago or would do next century.

Back at home, Talia got swept away by Christina for something baby related and Peter hurried to retreat to his room before somebody could ambush him as well. It was the early afternoon, there were quite a few people home.

Upstairs it wasn't that quiet either. On the weekends Isaac had time to play on his computer and sometimes him yelling at the other players was audible on the whole floor even for human ears. It got countered by loud music coming from Erica's room and if Peter wasn't mistaken, Boyd was in there as well. Sometimes some loud music was a good thing.

Boyd and Erica would leave later in the evening to go out for a movie or a party or whatever teenagers were up to these days while Isaac would keep playing until four in the morning. So Peter was sitting in his room with music coming from one direction and faint shooting noises and Isaac yelling over them from the other.

Peter turned on some music as well, just loud enough to cancel out most of the noises of the people in the house, and opened the live feed he had from the camera at the Argents' house. There was nobody in sight and Peter wasn't even sure if they were home at the moment. There was no car in the driveway but the garage was closed.

Before he did anything else, Peter texted Stiles to ask him if he was okay but the checkmark didn't turn blue so he guessed that he wouldn't get an answer any time soon. Stiles was most likely under again.

Peter went back to where he'd left off with the observation of the Argents and then he was fast-forwarding his way through the video.

He watched Chris Argent taking out the trash and Victoria coming home with groceries. The elderly lady Peter had spoken to the other day came over for a little chat when she saw Victoria outside. Peter didn't have a good view on Victoria's face but it looked kind of forced when she was making friendly with the neighbor.

Aside from that, nobody else came by.

Chris had left in his car a while ago but if it was for another errand or if he had the trunk loaded with wolfsbane bullets, Peter couldn't tell.

It became more and more clear that the hunters would not show up at the Argent's house. It was

more likely that they had met somewhere else and that the hunters already had their delivery and were on their merry way.

However, Chris Argent was a hunter so Peter better kept an eye on him nevertheless. He'd given Chris' name and license plate, along with what he knew about the other hunters, to the pack members working at the sheriff's department to keep an eye out for them but so far nothing had come up.

Peter kept the live stream running but at the moment he was looking at an empty house.

With nothing else to do, Peter had another look at the receipt he'd gotten from the hardware store. It didn't become less disturbing when he went over it now.

The hunter, Daniel Page, had bought some tools, electrical wiring, and several feet of chain. There might be some innocent explanation for that purchase, maybe Page had some interesting kinks, but to Peter, this looked a lot like somebody was preparing to capture a werewolf. He should talk to Talia about this, they needed to enforce some basic safety rules.

Still nothing on the guy in the bookstore, though. Why a High School chemistry book? Maybe that had been a personal purchase and had nothing to do with hunting werewolves. Even hunters had hobbies. Or so Peter had heard.

Not getting anywhere with this, Peter opened the file he had on Derek. Mainly it was a list of wild guesses what he might be.

Derek hadn't shown any intention to do anything to the pack as long as they left him and his lake alone. And Stiles. Derek had come to Peter twice to find out about their intention with Stiles. If Derek ever thought that they were harming Stiles in any way …

Derek had even stated Stiles' safety as one of his conditions to keep the truce between himself and the pack. He'd spoken about the both of them but Peter had the feeling that Derek put Stiles' safety above his own. Peter hoped that Derek was not one to take an argument or a breakup as hurting somebody, though.

Not that he had the intention to break up with Stiles but there was no way to be with somebody without hurting their feelings at one point or the other, that was just life. Question was if Derek understood that.

Either way, it never sat right with Peter if he didn't know who or what he was dealing with so he was determined to find out what Derek was. Even if it was just to satisfy his own curiosity.

He was browsing the internet for some inspiration, he did have quite some books on European myths and tales but there were too many variations to fit in a book, when he caught movement on the small window with the live feed from the Argents' house. There was somebody at their door.

"Who are you?"

Chapter 35

There was a woman at the Argents' door. Peter maximized the window to have a better look at her.

She'd rung the doorbell and was now standing there, impatiently tapping her foot. When nobody answered, she rang again, longer this time. When after a few moments the door still stayed close, she stepped back to have a look at the front of the house as a whole and then went around one side to check there as well. She came back to the front a few seconds later, now with her phone at her ear. She was speaking to somebody but Peter didn't have audio so he could only guess that she was on the phone with one of the Argents. She stood on the sidewalk, gesturing wildly while she spoke to whoever was on the other end of the line. She ended the call, had another look up and down the street before she got in the car and drove off.

Peter wrote down the license plate before he went back to find a good shot of her face.

With the license plate, it didn't take long to put a name to that face.

Kate Argent.

When that name came up on the screen Peter sat back in his chair. He'd heard that name before.

One Google search later he knew where he'd heard it before. He'd dismissed her earlier because Stiles had said that the hunter at the mall had been talking about a man named Argent and Chris as an arms dealer seemed to be the right guy. He probably still was. So Peter hadn't looked into the substitute English teacher. Who turned out to be Chris' sister. And as that she most likely was a hunter as well.

She was teaching Cora's grade.

Peter did not want the whole pack to know about this so he didn't bellow for Talia but they needed to talk. Now.

He found her in the kitchen with Christina and Deborah. Talia was in the middle of telling a story about baby Laura but Peter didn't have time for this.

"Excuse me, ladies." He swept in. "I need to borrow my big sister real quick."

Of course, she wanted to know what this was about but she did let him lead her outside and out into the woods. This was nothing he wanted to discuss in a house full of people.

Once he was sure that nobody would be able to listen in to them, Peter stopped in his tracks.

"Peter, what's going on?" Talia asked. "What's so important that it can't wait until tonight?" Which would be their usual time for conversations between alpha and left hand.

"We have a hunter problem," Peter admitted.

He told her about the two hunters who may or may not be planning on capturing and most likely torturing a werewolf and the Argent siblings with the sister already well established as a teacher at the local high school.

At the last part, Talia went pale.

"Teacher?" She repeated. "Which grade?" Because there were only two grades she cared about.

Boyd, Erica, and Issac went together and Cora a year behind them.

"Cora's," Peter confirmed. "She's been at the school for weeks. I should have noticed earlier, I'm sorry."

"Not your fault." She was quick to assure him but it was his fault. It was his job to keep them safe and he hadn't noticed such a threat so close to one of the most vulnerable members of the pack.

Cora was sixteen. She was a teenager and so far the adults, mainly Peter, had managed to keep the harsh reality from her. But there were hunters out there. Most went after omegas who'd gone off the rails. The Hales were a stable pack, they were well established in the community, they should be safe. Should. Peter let out a bitter laugh.

"What now?" Talia pulled him out of his thoughts.

"I have eyes on Chris but I'm going to tighten the net around him," Peter said. In his mind, he was already pondering which strings to pull and which favors to call in. "Kate's name came up half an hour ago but I'm going to have a good look at her. And I need to find those other hunters but I might get lucky when I observe Kate. I doubt that we're having such an influx of hunters without them working together."

Talia nodded along but she had a distant look on her face, thinking.

"I'm a member of the town council and the church," she finally said. "I should welcome new citizens in our community, don't you think?"

"What do you have in mind?" Peter dared to ask. A direct approach was risky, they would let the Argents know that they knew about them. On the other hand, it might be a good chance to get some information.

"I'm going to bake a cake and tomorrow you and I are going over for a little welcome visit," Talia decided. "We can at least get to Chris and his wife that way, Kate's been here too long for that to look plausible and two visits like this would be too obvious." She had her thumb between her lips again, nibbling at her nail.

"I could talk to her in a teacher-parent meeting," she pondered but she clearly didn't like the idea.

"Let's check out Chris first," Peter said.

If Peter was honest, Kate looked as if she was on an undercover mission and he didn't think that blowing her cover at this moment was a good idea. Better find out more about her plans before they confronted her. She'd been teaching at the school for weeks now without causing any ripples. What was her plan? What did she hope to gain with this?

"You should ask Cora about her new teacher," Peter suggested. "Nothing too direct just if she likes her or if her regular teacher is better, things like that. Don't spook her."

"And I'm just going to let her go back to school on Monday as if nothing is going on?" Talia slung her arms around her middle as if she was feeling cold all of a sudden. "I can't just …"

Peter understood, he didn't like it either. The others, Boyd, Erica, and Isaac had classes together, they could watch out for each other but Cora was alone.

"I might have an idea but I have to talk to Stiles first." It was a terrible idea but it was the only thing Peter could think of at the moment. "And the sheriff, we'll need his help with this."

Getting Stiles on board would be the easy part, Peter was not so sure about John. They had gotten along quite well and the sheriff was way more open-minded than Peter would have ever guessed but he had no idea how John would react to his idea.

"Hmm?" Talia gave him a questioning look.

"Let's focus on Chris for now." Peter dismissed her, he needed to think about his idea for a little while longer. If they did this, they had to do it right, it would be pointless if Kate immediately knew what was up.

They discussed the situation for a little while longer, Talia wanted to know every little information he'd gathered about the hunters, but in the end, they had to agree that there wasn't much they could do for now.

When they came back into the house, Talia went to figure out which cake she wanted to bake while Peter went back upstairs.

He texted Stiles but the checkmark of his earlier message still hadn't turned blue so he didn't expect an answer anytime soon. It had been a stressful day for Stiles and he might stay under for a little while longer. Peter didn't exactly know how it worked but according to Stiles being under felt nice and he was prone to forget the time while he was down there.

However, if Peter hadn't heard from him by tomorrow, he would drive out to the lake to check on him. He was not worried, not really, but the idea of meeting Talia had driven Stiles into a panic attack, Peter would feel better once he knew that Stiles was okay.

Not that he had an idea what he would do if Stiles wasn't in his cabin. Should he call out for him? Or for Derek? At least the lake was remote enough that there would be nobody to witness him yelling over the lake.

He couldn't do anything about that now so Peter put the phone aside to check if something had happened at the Argents' house in the meantime. Victoria had come home with groceries but neither Chris nor his sister was back yet.

Peter used the rest of the day to make a few calls and see a few people, something he probably should have done earlier but without Kate in the mix, things hadn't looked too bad. But now there was a hunter teaching English to one of the kids in his pack.

While he was out in town, Peter checked out Kate's address as well. She was living in an apartment complex, nothing special but for sure not a place where hunters would bring, for example, a captured werewolf. On the other hand, it was not upscale enough for the neighbors to bat an eye at unfamiliar faces in the house.

Peter didn't go in to test the theory but since he knew that Kate had a set schedule, he would come back on Monday to have a closer look at her apartment. For now, he just made sure that he knew which windows belonged to her place and to get a feeling for the surroundings.

Stiles still hadn't even read his messages by Sunday morning. Peter wrote him that he would come out to the lake after this thing he had to do first and that Stiles better be there. Peter was getting an uneasy feeling here, Stiles hadn't been incommunicado for this long before, but that had to wait because of said other thing. Which was Talia's welcome visit at the Argents. So Peter put on some nice clothes, grabbed a bottle of wine, and then he drove them over to the Argents.

Victoria's face when she opened the door was priceless. However, that answered the question if she

knew about her husband's real profession.

She caught herself quickly, though, and even brought out an almost polite: "Can I help you?"

Talia put on her best smile, the one she used for benefit events when she was trying to get people to write a bigger check than intended, and cheerfully introduced them as the welcome party.

"Who is it?" Chris came up behind his wife and Peter had to give him kudos for keeping his features open and relaxed even when his heart stumbled over a beat or two.

The next hour was the most surreal Peter had ever experienced.

Remembering her manners, Victoria had asked them to come in. Apparently, the cake looked so delicious that they had to have some right away. Or it was a test in case they had poisoned it. Either way, here Peter was, eating cake with the Argents.

They were sitting around the table, making polite small talk while at the same time everybody was digging for information. It was a tense dance which was right up Peter's alley. And Chris' as well, it looked like. It was kind of fun, actually.

Victoria had been eyeing the bottle of wine Peter had brought as if she really wanted to open that as well but since as werewolves Peter and Talia wouldn't be affected by the alcohol, she'd decided against it. But her eyes kept flickering over to the bottle, somebody needed a drink. Badly.

They had covered how the Argents liked Beacon Hills and if they had settled in yet, their daughter Allison had come up but she was staying with her grandfather in France at the moment.

"Sixteen you say? Just like my Cora." Talia gave Victoria another of her winning smiles which the other woman answered with a sour look. "They grow up so fast. Cora's already looking into where she wants to go to college. She alters between following Laura, her sister, and going somewhere completely different." Talia shook her head, amused over her little one. Neither Chris nor Victoria seemed to see anything amusing in the changing moods of a teenager.

"So, Chris," Peter filled the following silence. "What are you doing for a living?"

Chapter 36

"You want me to what?" Stiles asked, using his whole body to transfer the *what the fuck* behind his words because what the fuck. "Why are there suddenly hunters everywhere? Why are you having cake with them? How long have I been under? Because yesterday there has been no talk about having cake with hunters. Have I missed a whole week or something?"

It had happened before, he'd gone under for what he'd thought was a day, two at the max, and bam, he'd missed a month. But it didn't feel like that today.

Peter just gave him an unimpressed look. They were sitting at Stiles' small table. When Stiles had come up and had found Peter's messages, the last one telling him that if he didn't answer, Peter would come out to the lake, he'd hurried to tell him that he was topside. He'd told Peter to come over, Stiles wanted to know what Talia had said about him and Derek after their lunch.

Awesome as he was, Peter had brought curly fries and a chocolate milkshake. Stiles had sucked half of the shake through the straw with hollowed cheeks, that stuff was thick, while Peter had brought him up to date but then Stiles had almost spit out most of the milkshake because of what Peter had just suggested.

"I want you to go to school," Peter repeated calmly. "I need somebody to keep an eye on that English teacher."

"You have a big family, there should be someone you can ask."

"Yeah, it wouldn't be obvious at all if I put a Hale in her class." Peter let the sarcasm drip from his words. "Besides, there is no one Cora's age."

"I'm not her age either," Stiles muttered.

"Have you looked in the mirror lately?" Peter gave him a pointed look which Stiles choose to ignore.

But Peter was right. Stiles was familiar with the Hale family, he'd done his research, there was no one. Besides, if they had another kid of Cora's age they would be in class with her already.

"How would that work anyway?" Stiles dared to ask. "I can't just stroll into the High School like that." He reached for the bag with the curly fries because this was definitely a severe curly fries situation.

"We'll need John's help." Peter stole a fry before he leaned back in his chair as if he'd won this argument already, that smug bastard. "We'll just say that things with your parents went south for real, Denise is spreading rumors in that direction anyway, and that you moved in with your uncle. He doesn't want you to fall behind too much so he hurries to get you enrolled in school."

Stiles chewed on four fries at once, thinking. It sounded good. Simple, believable.

"I might not be an expert on this, I've never been to school, but don't you need documents for that? A birth certificate or something?" Stiles pointed out the most obvious flaw in Peter's plan. "In case you haven't noticed, I don't have any papers."

"That shouldn't be a problem." Peter dismissed him and attempted to steal another fry but Stiles snatched it right out of his hand and put a protective arm around the bag.

"You got me these to butter me up." He pointed with the rescued fry at Peter. "If you want some you should have bought some for yourself. And what do you mean, it shouldn't be a problem? It's a big problem for like everything."

Stiles didn't even have simple things like a bank account or a driver's license because of that. Lucky him, every deputy around here knew him and never asked for his license anyway. But if Stiles wanted to do anything, he had to use John's name and credit card.

"I can cobble together something in a few days," Peter assured him. "Nothing solid, I would need a little more time for that, but enough for the local high school."

"You can do that?" Stiles perked up at that. He'd used fake IDs to get into clubs or to buy beer but nothing that would hold up to a closer look.

"Yes," Peter confirmed but then he was looking at Stiles as if he'd just gotten an idea. "Give me some time and I can give you an identity. With a birth certificate, social security number, everything. From the hospital you were born in, over every school you've been to, to the grave of your by now diseased parents if you want. If I say I can make it solid, I mean solid. Nobody will be able to tell that it's not the truth."

It was tempting. Since they were on the topic of school, that was the direction Stiles' mind went first. He was a curious guy and he'd self-educated himself via books and internet on various topics but maybe he could attend school for real, graduate. Since he couldn't leave for longer periods of time, he wouldn't be able to actually go to college and who was he fooling baby-faced as he was he would never be able to make a career but these days there was a lot of stuff he could do online. He could take some classes.

He'd looked into things like that before because what else was he supposed to do with his time but he'd been running into walls. With an identity that would change. How he would pay for that was something he would think about later. But he could get a bank account and maybe a credit card. His porn wouldn't have to show up on John's card any longer with was definitively a plus.

"My pack took away everything you had," Peter said, serious now. "I can't give you back what you've lost, I can't make it right but I can give you this."

Peter was right, it wouldn't magically fix Stiles' life. He would still be bound to the lake, to Derek, and still on a very short leash and that was okay, he liked his life as it was. But it would give him some freedom.

"Okay," Stiles said. His voice broke over the word and he had to blink against his suddenly wet eyes. This was not just about some stupid bank account, he would be a person again. He would officially exist again.

"Sorry." Stiles wiped his eyes with the heel of his hand. "This is a bit much."

Peter gave him a sympathetic look but Stiles doubted that he could even start to understand what his offer meant to Stiles.

"Anyway." Stiles cleared his throat. "Your plan is to give my fake birth certificate to the sheriff so that he can use it to enroll me in school?"

"Is there a problem with that?" Peter had the nerve to ask but if Stiles was honest, he didn't see a problem there. John might be even more overwhelmed by this than Stiles. He tried to hide it but John was more bothered by Stiles' limited options than Stiles himself.

"I'm having dinner with him later, let's find out then." Stiles was still not sure about this whole going to school thing but he was willing to give it a try. Especially since this was not about going to school, this was an undercover mission.

"Are you free tonight?" Stiles asked. "You should join us for dinner."

"I had cake with a hunter, I can have dinner with the sheriff." Peter shrugged. "I'll pick you up."

With that, it was settled. Stiles sat back in his chair to slowly sip the rest of his milkshake, his mind still riled up.

"You do know that this won't help with convincing Cora that I'm not jail bait and that you're not a pedophile, right?" Stiles broke the silence.

"I'm aware." Peter let out a sigh. To an outsider looking at their relationship, Peter was the bad guy. Not that Stiles was sure if what they had counted as a relationship yet, they only had a few dates so far. On the other hand, they did have introduced each other to their parents so to speak. Peter had met John, Stiles' kind of father, and Stiles had met Talia, Peter's alpha.

"We could tell her," Stiles offered. "About me, I mean."

He wasn't keen on telling people about his past but at least werewolves knew how to keep a secret. And if what he had with Peter lasted, he would have to deal with the rest of his pack rather sooner than later anyway. Hence why he'd agreed to meet Talia in the first place.

"No." Peter shook his head. "She would know that I put you in her class and she would ask why."

"You don't want to scare her."

"Partly." Peter made a face. "She's the only werewolf in that class, whatever Kate is up to, it has to do with Cora. If she knew about Kate, about you, she could involuntary give you away."

"You're using her as bait."

"I'm sending you in to keep an eye on her," Peter said but didn't deny the bait part. "Talia is currently talking to the pack. They need to know that there are hunters around. We're enforcing some basic safety rules."

"Says the one who came out to a remote lake all by his own," Stiles couldn't help to point out. Peter ignored his comment.

"Cora is going to stick to the older teenagers as much as possible but she has to go to her own classes," Peter continued. "I need somebody there. To keep an eye on her and to keep an eye on Kate."

It was obvious how much Peter did not like the situation. If he could, he would take Cora out of class until Kate was gone but that would raise suspicion and Kate would know that her cover was blown, Stiles got that.

"I won't let anything happen to her." Stiles reached over and put his hand on Peter's forearm.

Peter had to leave not much later, he had some things he needed to take care of, but he would be back later that evening to pick up Stiles for their dinner with John.

Once Peter was gone, Stiles cleaned up, deep in thoughts. He hadn't been lying when he'd said that

he'd never been to school. He doubted that it was like what he'd seen on TV.

"I just hope this is going to be more 21 Jump Street than Twilight," Stiles muttered to himself while he typed a message to John to let him know that they would have a guest tonight.

He just hoped that the rumors about him and Cora had died down and hadn't spread to the school because that would be awkward.

Once he'd gotten a confirming message from John, Stiles went under again. For one, he wanted to tell Derek about this, as a complete outsider Derek sometimes brought up some interesting points and even if not, Stiles needed to talk about the ID thing. And second, he wanted to stay out as long as possible tonight so he surfaced only minutes before Peter was due to pick him up.

He hurried to put on some dry clothes, grabbed his keys and wallet, and then he was almost sprinting towards the road. Sure enough, Peter's car was already there, waiting for him.

Stiles had a quick look up and down the road, with his luck, Parrish would catch him with an older man out here again. His face would be hilarious if he saw Peter with him, that much was for sure, but Stiles was not keen on building up a reputation of sucking dick for money or whatever Parrish would come up with.

Not that he hadn't done that in the past, one had to eat, kind of, but since he was the sheriff's nephew now, he had agreed to not do that prostitution thing any longer. Or the stealing. Or anything else illegal. Stiles had even agreed to stay out of sight while kids should be at school. The latter shouldn't be a problem for much longer because it looked very much like Stiles was about to start school.

After another look down the road, Stiles hurried to get into the waiting car.

"You're late."

"The longer I can stay." Stiles winked at him. Peter just rolled his eyes at him and brought the car back on the road.

They picked up dinner on the way, burgers and curly fries, which immediately filled the car with a mouth-watering smell.

"You already had those for lunch," Peter pointed out but only after they had bought them.

"It's a bribe. It'll make him more likely to agree to your plan."

"Sure you're not related?" Peter threw him a glance.

"Just don't tell him that I already had some," Stiles told him. "Unlike him, I don't have to worry about cholesterol and clogged arteries."

"You're worried about him."

"He's the only family I have."

Chapter 37

Peter left the task of telling the pack about the hunters to Talia. As the alpha, it was her job anyway and she was better at convincing people that they had things under control and that they were enforcing basic safety rules just in case. Peter wouldn't say that they had the situation under control and the safety rules were not there just in case because it was clear that the hunters were up to something. But it was Talia's job to keep the pack calm and safe while it was Peter's to get rid of the threat.

Which meant that he had to find those damn hunters. He knew where the Argents lived and he had eyes on both of them but so far no sign of those other hunters. Peter spent the afternoon, making calls and seeing people but so far no luck. The hunters were lying low.

By the time Peter pick up Stiles, he did have some good news on the identity thing, though.

Like he'd said, it would take time to make it solid but he should get a birth certificate for him the day after tomorrow. Along with the official documents, making John Stiles' guardian. John could enroll him tomorrow with the excuse that Stiles had to leave his parents' home quickly and that they needed a day or two to get the papers in order.

Peter parked next to the sheriff's cruiser in John's driveway with mixed feelings, though. John had explicitly told him to not use Stiles for his own benefit or else. And here he was, asking for just that.

Which reminded him, Derek had given him the same warning.

"John and Derek won't be mad at me, will they?" Peter only half-joked. Being on the sheriff's bad side would be not good, being on Derek's could end in a disaster for him and his pack.

"Isn't it a bit late to think about that?" Stiles asked. "John will be cool with it, don't worry. And Derek finds the idea amusing, to be honest. It's not as if you're abusing me, I'm a willing participant."

Peter wanted to say something to that but then the front door opened and John asked if they wanted to come in or camp out in the car.

Stiles had been right, John was more than willing to listen as long as he got his burger. On the other hand, he immediately knew that something was up when he spotted the logo on the bags Stiles was carrying in but with Peter tagging along he'd known already.

At least John already knew about werewolves and turned out he knew about hunters as well.

"Where do you think I got the wolfsbane bullets from?" John asked and used his napkin to wipe some sauce off his chin. "I needed to know a few things so I went to the people who knew."

"Hunters are not a reliable source of information." Peter didn't even want to think about all the wrong ideas those hunters must have put into John's head. Along with what Stiles had to say about werewolves, it was a miracle that they were sitting peacefully at the same table.

"Figured that much," John agreed and reached for the curly fries.

Stiles looked as if he wanted to snatch those away like he'd done with Peter earlier that day but unlike him, John was allowed to have some. But Stiles kept a close eye on how many he took.

Peter guessed that it was only partly because Stiles didn't want to share the fries, it was more the fact that John was just a mere mortal. He was Stiles' only family, Stiles had pointed that out just minutes ago, and Peter got that he wanted to have him around for as long as possible. Eventually, John would die, Stiles was very aware of that fact, that much was clear. Peter wondered if Stiles would be as protective over him as well someday. As a werewolf, Peter was not likely to die from a random heart attack but he was still mortal, he too would die eventually while Stiles wouldn't have aged a day.

"I listened to the tales of bloodthirsty werewolves but I wanted to see for myself," John continued, pulling Peter out of his thoughts.

"So you just sat back and waited if bodies turned up?" Peter wondered. John had managed to be in the know and stay undetected for how long?

"Derek was the bigger threat," John reminded him. "He was actually killing people." He locked eyes with Peter. "As long as you play by the rules and don't endanger people, I don't care if you howl at the moon at night."

"We don't actually do that." Peter felt the need to clarify.

"Besides, in the eyes of most hunters, Stiles is not human either and as that a threat they need to take care of."

"Yeah, I'm a scary monster." Stiles huffed out a bitter laugh.

"Anyway, I'm not on the side of the hunters," John said. "But I'm not on your side either. I'm on the side of the law. I will protect you as well as I can but the same goes for them. Don't break the law and we're all good." He ended his little speech with a stern look at Peter.

"Speaking of breaking the law …" Peter started to which John made a pained face. He even put down his burger.

"So this is the part where you tell me what you two are up to?" He looked from Peter to Stiles but in the end, he settled on Peter.

"I set some things in motion to set up an identity for Stiles," Peter said. "Starting with a birth certificate."

"You can do that?" John asked, his voice breaking just like Stiles' when they'd talked about this earlier. Stiles' eyes were way too shiny again too. If Peter had known how much this meant to him, he would have offered weeks ago.

"Yes," Peter confirmed but then to lighten the mood, this was getting uncomfortable, he added: "If the sheriff is willing to look the other way while I forge official documents, heard he's very strict when it comes to obeying the law."

It had the desired effect, John snorted and shared a glance with Stiles. However, his focus was on Peter again a second later.

"You didn't come up with that just to do something nice for Stiles."

"No," Peter admitted. He did wish he'd come up with this just because, though.

He told John about Kate Argent who was currently teaching English at the local High School.

"I'm going undercover," Stiles piped up. At least he seemed to have grown fond of the idea.

"I hate to break it to you." John squinted at Stiles, trying to picture him going undercover, no doubt. "But you're not subtle, you're loud and annoying."

"Hey!"

"In this case, it's a good thing," Peter said. "Anybody new in that class will look suspicious but some quiet kid who just watches all the time would raise way more red flags. Stiles is perfect for this job. He looks the right age, he doesn't have a connection to the Hale Pack and as your nephew, he has an established background."

"Didn't you mention that Cora knows about you and Peter?" John wondered.

"I have a deal with her, she won't tell anybody," Peter assured him before Stiles could answer the question. "Aside from her only Talia knows about our relationship."

After dinner, they moved over to the living room where they discussed the details for a little while longer and in the end, they agreed that Stiles should start school as quickly as possible.

Officially Stiles would live with John from now on so Stiles would come "home" after school instead of driving back out to the lake in case somebody was watching him.

Stiles wouldn't be able to stay for long, he had to go back to the lake one way or the other but it should be enough to convince whoever might be observing him that he did live with the sheriff.

John had to leave for his night shift not much later but he promised to contact the school first thing in the morning. Peter wasn't sure if this was his cue to leave as well but Stiles held him back.

"How about some more Marvel?" Stiles asked and how could Peter say no to that? The movies were fun, Peter had to admit, but what sold it was Stiles' enthusiasm.

And Peter was already looking forward to the discussion they would have afterward. Stiles knew his meta and he liked to get carried away but at the same time he managed to keep it on Peter's level and only referred to the movies Peter had watched so far.

They were still talking about the movie when suddenly Derek stood in the door to the kitchen.

"Shit!" Stiles almost fell from the couch when he spotted him. "What time is it?"

As if that mattered somehow. Derek was here so it was time to go. That didn't stop Stiles from whining about time running too fast. Loudly.

"We didn't even get to the sex part."

"I'm sure Derek will wait if we make it quick," Peter said dryly.

"Would you?" Stiles looked at Derek with big eyes and way too much hope.

"No." Peter cut him off before Derek could say anything to that. "We're not going to have sex while Derek is standing right there."

Stiles pouted but Peter hoped that it was all fake. Exhibitionism was not on his kink list and there wasn't coming any help from Derek who was just standing there. So far he hadn't even said a word.

"Okay, rain check." Stiles gave in. "But you're coming by the cabin tomorrow and we're going to

blow each other's brains out."

"That sounds rather threatening."

The way Stiles smirked at him was not helping and Peter really wished that they had the time but now Derek was stepping forward.

"Stiles."

"Yeah, yeah, just let me see out Peter real quick."

With Derek looming in the background, they didn't even kiss goodbye and seconds later Peter was on his way back home.

It was a strange feeling to let Cora go to school the next morning but there was nothing Peter could do about it. He and Talia shared a glance, she didn't like it either. If it had been Emily they could have kept her home for a few days claiming some illness but Kate knew that Cora was a werewolf. If they did that Kate would know that they had made the connection between Chris and her.

Peter didn't know Kate well enough to predict how she would react but he doubted that she would drop everything and run. It was more likely that she would rush her plan whatever it was and Peter did not want that. Not before he knew more.

So he and Talia just watched when Cora climbed into the car with Boyd, Erica, and Isaac. At least everybody now knew that there were hunters in town and that this was not the time to fool around.

Since it was a normal school day, Kate would be at school as well, meaning this was the best time to have a closer look at her place.

Breaking into her place was not that hard but there was not that much to find either. Kate didn't have many personal items in her apartment although she'd been living here for months. In the bathroom, he found only the basics but not much make-up or luxury of any kind. The clothes in the closet were more practical than fancy and there weren't that many either.

"You travel light," Peter said when he closed the closet. "Ready to run at any time."

She had a laptop but there weren't many personal files on there, Peter mainly found school-related things. The most personal thing he found was an email exchange with another teacher. They had set up what sounded like a date and the guy, Adrian, thanked her in a later email for the great evening. Apparently, not many people shared his interests and he was looking forward to continuing their conversation, maybe over dinner sometime? That email was weeks old, Kate hadn't responded. Peter made a copy anyway.

He closed the laptop and had a look around the living room.

On a side-table, he found a High School Chemistry book.

Kate was an English teacher, she had nothing to do with chemistry. However, one of the other hunters had purchased a book like this not long ago.

"So you do know them."

He skimmed through the book. Kate had marked a passage about thermic reactions and a few experiments related to that topic. Peter remembered some of those from his own chemistry lessons, the most memorable one included some singed eyebrows, not Peter's, but even on a bigger scale,

nothing in that book should be able to cause real harm to a werewolf. Should.

Peter left Kate's apartment with an uneasy feeling and still no clue what she was planning.

Chapter 38

Stiles went to school for the first time on Wednesday.

The night before, Peter and Talia had a late-night discussion if they should tell Cora that one of her teachers was a hunter but they had agreed that they wanted to wait for Stiles' report.

On one hand, Peter was breathing easier because now there was somebody who had an eye on Cora and Kate.

On the other hand, Peter was worried how Stiles would fit into school. According to him, he'd never been to one. He'd watched High School Musical if that counted as research? Peter hoped that he'd been joking.

Over the morning, Peter got two text messages from Stiles, telling him that everything was fine, which was not reassuring at all. What was happening over there that Stiles felt the need to tell him that everything was fine?

Peter would drive out to the lake later, he wanted a detailed report, but for now, he could only wait. There was no news on the other hunters so Peter kept himself busy with checking out hunting cabins in remote areas. They hadn't been spotted in town for days now and neither Chris nor Kate Argent had anything hinting at their true profession at home. If Peter didn't count the guns Chris had in his garage but the ammunition he also had in there were just regular bullets. He was an arms dealer by trade. It led Peter to the conclusion that they had set up base somewhere else. Somewhere remote.

Without a hint in which direction to look, the search was time-consuming and frustrating but Peter needed to do something. Aside from a pissed off raccoon, he found nothing, though.

When he came back to the house in the afternoon, most of the pack was already there.

With the hunters in town, things were tense but since there was no immediate danger, the normal day to day problems were more important.

Michael and Christina were discussing baby names, with input from Pamela and Deborah, while Anthony was helping Emily with her homework. Boyd and Erica were in their own little world while Isaac was glaring at his homework as if he wanted to set it on fire. Talia and Walter were in the kitchen, preparing dinner it sounded like but Peter didn't go to check because he didn't want to get roped into helping. Instead, he headed over to the group currently arguing if *Timothy* was too old-fashioned.

However, before he could join the discussion, Cora came out of nowhere, grabbed him by the wrist, and hissed: "We need to talk."

With that, she dragged him out of the room.

This was about Stiles, Peter knew that. Maybe he should have given her a warning. He let her drag him up the stairs to the library.

"Why the fuck is Stiles in my class?" She hissed once Peter had closed the door. Even with a closed door and one floor between them and the rest of the pack, they better kept their voices down if they didn't want half the pack to know what they were talking about.

"Language, young lad," Peter said just because and sauntered over to one of the chairs. "He's the sheriff's nephew and I heard that he'd moved in with him. At least for now. So, of course, he goes to school here." Peter made himself comfortable in the chair but his mind was racing. How much should he tell her?

"Bullshit." She was looming over him, an accusing finger right in his face.

Flashing his eyes, he snapped his fangs at it.

Cora growled back at him but kept her fingers to herself.

"Kate Argent, your English teacher." Peter made a decision. He'd wanted to keep Cora in the dark, partly to protect her, partly so that she couldn't give away information by accident, but he had to give her something now.

"What about her?" She blinked in surprise, the gold vanishing from her eyes.

"She's one of the hunters your mom told you about." Peter made an inviting gesture to the chair next to him and to his surprise, Cora sat down.

"No, she's …," she started but didn't know what to say to that. "You're wrong."

"No." Peter shook his head. "She comes from a long line of hunters. I don't know what she's planning but I doubt that she's taken the job as a teacher just because she was bored. It is not a coincidence that she's in your class."

"No."

"We didn't want to tell you," Peter admitted. "We didn't want to worry you."

"You didn't want me to give away that you know about her." Cora gave him a look that was hard to read.

"You're my favorite for a reason." A feral grin spread over his face.

"Don't sweet-talk me. I'm mad at you." She sounded distant, most likely going over every class she'd had with Kate, looking for things off. "Are you sure she's a hunter?"

"Yes.," Peter said. There was a roller coaster of emotions coming from her, this must be quite a shock. "I did my research, I'm sure."

"Why Stiles?" She changed the topic.

Peter looked up at the ceiling, not sure how much he wanted to tell her.

"The hunters don't know that he has a connection to us," Peter stated the most obvious fact.

"The only connection he has to us is to your dick," Cora muttered in disgust. "You lied about how old he is. He lied as well. He told me that he's eighteen but I heard his heat-beat, he was lying. He's not even seventeen, is he? He would be in class with Isaac and the others if he were."

"You are a very smart young lady." Peter had to give her that. Maybe he should start training her, the pack would need a new left hand sooner or later. "You're right, he's not eighteen."

"I knew it."

"He's older than me." Peter dropped the bomb.

"He … what?"

"He actually has a good century on me." Which still felt weird. Stiles didn't look that old. And he didn't act his age either.

"He's not human?"

"I'm not going to tell you the details." This was way more than he'd ever wanted to tell her. "But a long time ago, he was eighteen at that time, something happened to Stiles and he stopped aging."

"What happened to him?" She was hanging on his lips now.

"That's not on me to tell, you'll have to ask him yourself." Peter didn't give in to her pleading eyes. "All you need to know is that he's here to help. Boyd, Erica, and Isaac can look after each other but you're alone in your class and a hunter is your teacher, I need someone there to look out for you. And to keep an eye on Kate."

She nodded to that, still mulling over what he'd just said. He expected her to tell him that she could take care of herself just fine, thank you very much, but she seemed to be more caught up in what he'd just said about Stiles.

"And the sheriff is in on that?"

"You're too smart for your own good, you know that?" Peter got up, the noises from downstairs were telling him that dinner was ready.

"That's why I'm your favorite." She smiled at him but it was more mechanic than anything else. She was still deep in thoughts.

"Your mom knows about Stiles," Peter said. "But the rest of the pack doesn't. I would like to keep it that way."

"Of course." Cora nodded, now nibbling at her thumb. She looked a lot like a younger version of Talia like that. "If mom knows …," she started but had to collect her thoughts for a moment. "You won't tell her … you know."

Right, they had a deal. Cora wouldn't tell Talia about Stiles and Peter wouldn't tell her about Cora's preferences.

"You're the one going to tell her," Peter assured her and after a second he added: "When and if you're ready."

Relieved she let go of her thumb.

"How are things with your girlfriend anyway? All good?" Peter was already on his way to the door but he did want to know.

"Not sure," Cora admitted which made him stop in his tracks and turn back to her to give her his full attention. "I thought … but then …" She made a vague gesture. "Things got complicated?"

"Want to talk about it?" Peter offered. Teenage love affairs were not exactly what he wanted to talk about but he got that he probably was the only person Cora could turn to.

But Cora shook her head and then Isaac came upstairs to tell them that dinner was ready but Peter

hoped that Cora got that the offer stood.

Peter let the kids go ahead and took the moment to text Stiles that Cora would bombard him with questions tomorrow. They would see each other in a bit but he didn't want to forget to give him a heads-up.

Cora stayed mostly quiet over dinner, still deep in thoughts, but there were enough conversations going on that nobody noticed.

After dinner, Peter packed some leftovers before he slipped out of the door and drove over to the lake.

"Why is Cora going to bombard me with questions?" Stiles asked the second Peter entered the cabin. "It's bad enough that she was trying to glare me to death all day, why would she question me?"

"Because I told her that you stopped aging when you were eighteen and that she has to ask you if she wants to know the details." Peter closed the door and put the leftovers on the table. "Did you have dinner?"

"Did you have to tell her that?" Stiles groaned, already rummaging through the food Peter had brought. "Man, I think I love you." He'd found the chocolate muffin Peter had thrown in.

"That's called dessert." Peter snagged it out of his hand and put it aside for later to which Stiles pouted but he did sit down with the salad and the still lukewarm casserole.

"I also told her that Kate's a hunter." Peter sat down in the second chair and watched Stiles stuffing his face. The *I love you* was still ringing in his ears but he had the suspicion that Stiles would declare his undying love to anybody who brought him food.

"How was your first day of school?"

"Not like they tell you on TV." Stiles made a face. "My chemistry teacher hates me. I've met the guy today and he already hates me. That's not fair. Kate's suspicious but that was expected, think I annoyed her with too many questions." He grinned at that. "And PE is hell. Coach is insane. He also teaches Economics and that's kind of fun if he can stay on topic for two minutes but on the field, he's just a nutcase. I almost collapsed when he made us run laps. I'm not a runner."

"You have the physics of a runner." That was one of the things Peter admired of his body, the lean form, and the muscles under smooth skin.

"I have the physics of a swimmer," Stiles corrected. He'd finished the casserole and was now munching on the salad but his eyes were on the muffin. "I live in a fucking lake, what do you think I do all summer?"

"Skinny dipping?" Peter couldn't help but ask.

"Sometimes." Stiles shrugged. "We should go swimming sometime. But not in this lake, Derek would drown you."

"Don't want that to happen." Peter shuddered at that thought. "Met some new kids?" He hurried to change the topic.

"Yeah, I think I got adopted." Stiles chuckled to himself. "There's this Scott guy and I think he doesn't have any friends. And since I'm new he decided that we should be BFF."

"Play along."

"I am." Stiles finished his salad and made grabby hands for the muffin. "Oh, and then there's Lydia Martin. Man, I'm telling you she's giving me the weirdest case of deja vu ever." He bit into the muffin and closed his eyes in bliss.

"How so?" Peter prompted when Stiles just made out with the muffin instead of telling his story.

"Knew her grandmother. Or was it her great-grandmother? Can't remember." He licked crumbs off his thumb. "This Lydia was named after her and damn, she looks a lot like her."

"Martin?" Peter recognized the name. They were what counted as high society in Beacon Hills. "How did you get to know a Martin?"

"Was running errands for them one summer. Lydia was home from some fancy school and she was kind of lonely. She was the one who taught me to read." His eyes glossed over at that memory. "When her dad found out that she was hanging out with a street kid, he chased me off his property with his dogs." He popped the rest of the muffin into his mouth with a grin.

"Only you." Peter shook his head.

Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

> This chapter deals with some intense stuff. If you're worried about that, check the note at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thanks to Peter's warning, Stiles was not surprised when Cora cornered him in the morning. He'd not expected to get jumped before he'd gotten out of his car, though. He'd barely brought his jeep to a halt when Cora yanked the door open and slipped into the passenger seat.

"Morning," she greeted him with a toothy smile.

"It's too early for this," Stiles groaned and let his head rest on the steering wheel. Maybe if he didn't look at her she would go away. "Do you have any idea how hard it is to be here on time?"

"Uncle Peter told me that you stopped aging." Cora ignored him. "How does one just stop aging?"

Stiles peeked at her over his arm still resting on the steering wheel.

"Uncle Peter wouldn't tell me, he said that I have to ask you. So I'm asking you." She looked at him as if she actually expected an answer.

"So you did." Stiles sat up again, he didn't want to go into school with the imprint of the steering wheel on his forehead. "Nice talk but I don't want to be late on my second day."

Stiles reached for the door but Cora grabbed his other arm, holding him back.

"Why don't you want to tell me?"

"Because it's none of your business." Stiles yanked his arm free.

"Was it bad?"

Stiles took a deep breath but he felt the tightness around his ribs. He could almost taste the water in the back of his throat.

Cora backed off. She must have picked up on some of that, his heart was beating quicker than it should and Stiles didn't even want to know what his scent was telling her.

"I'm sorry," Cora mumbled, watching him with wary eyes as if she expected him to have a panic attack any second now. Stiles took another breath and exhaled slowly, counting to ten in his head. It helped.

"Is that answer enough?" Stiles asked and reached for the door again. This time she didn't hold him back.

"What about Kate?" She got out of the car as well.

"What about her?"

"Uncle Peter says that she's one of the hunters in town." She lowered her voice, they weren't the only ones in the parking lot. "And that you're here to keep an eye on her."

Stiles nodded. Peter had also told him to keep an eye on Cora but he didn't feel the need to point that out.

"You sure she's a hunter?" Cora asked. "She's been here as a teacher for months now and she hasn't done anything wrong. Why would she waste her time teaching English at a small town High School?"

"That's what we need to find out."

"Hey, Stiles!" He was saved by Scott who was waving at him to get his attention. "Over here."

"Gotta go, see you in class." With that he jogged over to Scott.

"Was that Cora?" Scott craned his neck to look past Stiles but by then Cora had disappeared in the crowd heading towards the entrance. "Why are you driving Cora to school?"

"It's not what it looks like?" Stiles squinted at him but then the bell rang and they had to hurry to get to class.

Having Scott attached to his hip helped to blend in, Stiles found out. Kate was still suspicious of him but she couldn't prove that he was not who he claimed to be. However, neither could he. Kate seemed to be just a teacher.

On Monday Stiles even managed to have a look at Kate's desk but if she kept evil werewolf hunting stuff at school, it was not in her desk. Frustrated Stiles had a look around the classroom but there was nothing else to find.

Stiles ducked out of the room, he did not want anybody to see him in there, and breathed easier once he was out in the hallway again.

"Why are you smelling of Peter?" Erica was suddenly blocking his way.

Because we fucked each other' brains out last night, would have been the correct answer but Stiles caught himself before the words bubbled out of his mouth. Boyd came up behind him and without a word he grabbed Stiles by the collar.

"Hey!" Stiles protested but let them drag him out of the building. He knew that he couldn't fight them off and he didn't want to cause a scene. The memory of that back alley where Johnathan's goons had ambushed him so long ago flashed in the back of his mind. Stiles forced himself to breathe slowly in and out.

At least Erica seemed to notice that he was not comfortable with the situation and put an arm around his shoulders so that they were walking more comradely and it didn't feel that much like an abduction any longer.

They were heading out to the bleachers, of course. It was as remote as one could get at school. Boyd and Erica liked to come out here to make out.

"Why are you smelling of Peter?" Erica repeated the question once they were alone and out of sight. "How do you even know him?"

"We're friends," Stiles said and wound himself out from under her arm.

"You're the sheriff's nephew," Boyd spoke up. "That Stiles kid."

"That's me." He gave them his best grin. As far as Stiles knew he was the only new kid the school had seen in months, of course everybody knew him.

"What …," Boyd started a question but then his head shot up and he was scanning the tree line.

Stiles didn't have werewolf senses but when Erica was doing the same, he knew that there was something out there. Or someone.

"What is it?" He asked when suddenly there was a dart stuck in Erica's neck. Tranq dart, Stiles brain provided but before he could do anything, there was a similar dart embedded in Boyd's neck.

"Shit." Stiles managed to catch Erica when she went down but Boyd fell like a sack of potatoes.

"Shit, shit, shit," Stiles muttered while he laid Erica down as quickly as possible without letting her head smash to the ground. The second he had a hand free, he was searching for his phone.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw movement, someone came running over to them but Stiles didn't even have time to get up. A fist connected with his temple and the phone slipped out of his hand.

Not again, Stiles thought and then everything went dark.

Stiles came to kicking.

With a scream he tried to break free before he even had his eyes open. A sharp lance of pain shot through his shoulders, waking him up completely. Breathing heavily he tried to keep the rising panic under control while he took stock of his surroundings. His hands were bound over his head and as long as he was not kicking, his toes touched the ground. Barely.

"Where are we?" Stiles asked when he spotted Boyd and Erica in a similar predicament. Like him they were hanging by chains around their wrists but they got a special treatment with wires stuck into their sides. From this angle Stiles couldn't see the controls but one look at the two werewolves, Erica's face was scrunched in pain and Boyd was grunting under his breath, and Stiles knew that it was dialed up high.

"Dunno," Boyd brought out through gritted teeth while Stiles took in more of the room. Some basement which could be anywhere but that didn't matter because there was a sink in the corner.

"These fuckers tranqed us." Erica's eyes tried to flash golden but she didn't manage more than a weak flicker.

"That was just the start." Suddenly a man stood in the door. Boyd growled at him but the man ignored him when he came down the stairs.

"You followed me the other day." He came directly over to Stiles and grabbed him by the chin to have a better look at his face. Now Stiles recognized him, the hunter he'd run into at the mall. Daniel Page.

"Couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you with these animals."

He let go of Stiles' face and the next second his fist connected with Stiles' flank. Stiles didn't even have time to catch his breath, the guy was using him as a punching bag. Helplessly Stiles swung with the punches, his feet scratching over the concrete floor.

"Do I have your attention now?" Page stopped punching him and Stiles got his feet under him again. Head hanging he tried to catch his breath. He might have cracked a rib or two, breathing hurt like a bitch and Stiles blinked against the gray edges in his vision.

"How do you fit in, hmm?" The hunter ducked his head to look Stile in the eye. "You're not a wolf and you're not pack either, aren't you?"

Now Stiles lifted his head to glare at him.

"Fuck you!"

It got him a punch to the face. Stiles was seeing stars and he tasted blood and for a moment the world just spun around him. But then the hunter steadied him again.

"Heard you have a crush on that werewolf brat." Page grabbed his face and forced him to look at him.

"I'm going to kill Peter for spreading that rumor," Stiles muttered while the man was still squishing his face.

"Good advice, stay away from these animals."

"Too late for that." Stiles barked out a laugh. The left side of his face felt swollen.

Stiles glanced over to the sink. He didn't know how long he'd been unconscious but he did know that he only had to hold on for a little while longer. "What time is it? I have a curfew."

"We made sure that not even a werewolf can follow us." Page grinned at him. "Don't get your hopes up, nobody will come for you. Not in time."

"In time for what?" Erica asked but the man ignored her. Instead he rammed his knee into Stiles' stomach.

"That's what gets you off?" Stiles gasped out once he was able to breathe again. "Torturing teenagers?"

His shoulders were screaming in agony but he needed a moment to get back onto his toes. It was only a second of relief before the man hit him again.

Stiles didn't want to scream but he did. And then he didn't any longer but the man kept hitting him. Sometimes he stopped to ask him a question but he didn't seem particularly interested in the answer.

Stiles was hanging heavily from the chains. They were cutting so deep into his wrists, he didn't even feel his hands any longer. He was pretty sure that his left shoulder was dislocated and by now several ribs were broken for sure. Stiles didn't even want to think about internal bleeding. His left eye was swollen shut and his vision blurred but he kept glancing at the sink in the corner.

Anytime would be great now, Derek, he thought while in the background, Boyd and Erica were both pleading for the hunter to stop. He didn't.

But then, finally, Stiles caught something in the corner of his eye. The faucet started to move.

"Last chance, asshole." He gave Page a bloody grin. "Let us go."

"Or what?" The man cocked his head, clearly amused.

"Or you die." Stiles wasn't even looking at him any longer, his good eye was on Derek who was closing the distance to the hunter with quick strides.

Page even managed a half-turn so see what was coming up behind him but then Derek's hand closed over his face.

Stiles watched grimly when Derek slung his other arm around the man's torso, holding him close, while he kept his watery hand firmly over the guy's mouth and nose. Page struggled but he didn't stand a chance against Derek.

"Stiles?" Derek asked. He'd never liked killing people, Stiles knew that but what he was seeing in Derek's dark eyes now was way beyond what he'd ever seen in them. These were the eyes of a monster. When Stiles met his eyes he knew that his matched Derek's. He wanted this man dead.

"Finish him."

Derek didn't have to be told twice. In a swift move he lifted the man up and slammed him down on the concrete floor, knocking the wind out of him. Stiles heard bones crack with the impact.

Page screamed, muffled by the water filling his airways. His struggle became weaker already.

Eventually he stopped moving.

"Fatality," Erica broke the eery silence which ghosted a smile on Stiles' split lip.

Derek kept his hand over the man's face for a little while longer, making sure, but then he hurried over to Stiles.

He ripped the chains apart but caught him gently when Stiles collapsed.

"Stiles?"

Derek's cool hand felt nice on his abused face and Stiles leaned into the wet touch. He could let go now, Derek was here.

"Hey, Johnny Cage," Erica called out to them. Right, they weren't alone. "A little help here?"

Chapter End Notes

> Stiles, Boyd, and Erica get abducted. The werewolves get stuck with electrical wiring while Stiles gets severely beaten.
> Derek kills the hunter.
> Remember the scene when Gerard gets his hands on Stiles and beats him up? This is an exaggeration of that scene.

Chapter 40

Peter had spent the night with Stiles in his cabin but he didn't stay for breakfast. Stiles was in a hurry, he wanted to swing by John's place to take a shower and change into fresh clothes before he headed out to school, not as if a quick shower would be enough to wash off Peter's scent.

"You have a marking kink. You know that, right?" Stiles was prodding the hickey on his neck.

"It will only last until you go under again," Peter reminded him and stepped up behind him. "Have to make it worth it." He put his mouth on the abused spot, his teeth fit perfectly into the imprints already there.

"Down boy." Stiles pushed him away to which Peter let out a playful growl. "If you don't want me to be late for school, you stop that right now, mister."

Peter flashed his eyes at him which got him a groan and a whiff of arousal in return but then they hurried to leave the cabin. Stiles was right, Peter didn't want him to be late.

Peter arrived home early enough to take a shower before breakfast. He didn't shower thoroughly enough to wash off Stiles' scent so when he joined his family at the breakfast table, he got some knowing glances from the ones with werewolf noses. By now it was no secret any longer that he was seeing someone and that this someone was a man, Stiles' scent left no doubt about that, but so far only Talia and Cora knew who he was seeing.

The fact that he was dating a man raised way less questioning looks than the fact that he was dating somebody in the first place which gave him hope that Cora's coming out wouldn't be dramatic at all. Once she was ready for that.

After breakfast, everybody piled out and since he had the house to himself for once, Peter decided to get comfortable on the couch for a little nap, last night had been short.

He startled awake when his phone rang. He blindly fumbled for his phone but was instantly awake when he saw John's name on the display.

"John?" He answered. "What happened?"

"I need you at the school." John didn't waste time with greetings either. "Stiles got kidnapped. Along with two of your kids, Boyd and Erica."

"I'm on my way."

Peter drove fast, a white-knuckled grip on the steering wheel. It was his job to protect his pack but here he was, napping while two of his pack got abducted. From school. In broad daylight.

And Stiles. He had dragged him into this. Stiles didn't want to have anything to do with the Hales and now he'd gotten abducted as well. Most likely he'd just been a bystander who had gotten in the way.

When Peter arrived at the school, the parking lot was full of people. Classes with their teachers who were trying to keep the teenagers under control and deputies shooing people away from what Peter assumed was the crime scene.

"Deputy Parrish," Peter greeted the nearest deputy. "Sheriff Stilinski called me."

"Right this way." At least Parrish wasn't surprised to see him and led him over to the sports field where he spotted the sheriff, talking to a teenager. "Boyd and Erica are family?"

The deputy used the short walk to gain some intel, Peter would give him kudos for that if his mind weren't on other things.

"Yes, we took them in." Peter gave a clipped answer.

"And the sheriff took in Stiles," Parrish said more to himself than to Peter. He was seeing a pattern here and Peter didn't bother to correct him. If Parrish was looking in another direction it was fine with him.

"Ah, Peter," John greeted him. "This is Scott McCall, he called it in."

"Stiles' friend." Peter recognized the name. The teenager looked shaken but he was holding it together.

"Scott, would you tell Mr. Hale what you saw?" John asked to which Parrish made a disapproving noise, it was most likely against protocol to let civilians talk directly to a witness. But John ignored him and made an encouraging gesture at Scott.

"I saw Stiles in the hallway and I wanted to go over to him but then these older teenagers were there with him. Boyd and Erica, I think." He glanced over to John who nodded to confirm the names. "Stiles went with them. I was wondering what they wanted from him so I followed. They stopped over there. Then suddenly Boyd and Erica collapsed, I think they had something here." He gestured over his own neck, indicating a tranq dart. Which only confirmed what Peter had been thinking all along. This had been the hunters and it had been planned.

"A man came running from there, he knocked out Stiles, and another man came with a van. It happened so fast …" Scott's voice broke. "I called 911 but I should have …"

"You did the right thing," John assured him.

"They took Stiles. And the others." The kid had tears in his eyes. "But I've pictures of the van, that helps right?" He fumbled for his phone.

"That does help." John took the phone to have a look at the pictures. "Parrish, find this van." He handed the phone over to the deputy who hurried off.

With him out of the way, Peter took out his own phone.

"Were these the men you saw?"

Scott pointed out Daniel Page as the man who knocked out Stiles but he didn't have a good view on the other one.

John thanked Scott and waved over a deputy to take care of him.

Once they were alone, John turned to Peter.

"I need everything you know about these men."

Peter gave him the cliff-notes of what little he actually knew. He still hadn't found the place where the hunters were holing up.

"But we should talk to Kate Argent," Peter said. He tried to sound calm and collected but he felt his

fangs itching in his gums. He had no doubt that she was behind this. It was not a coincidence that the kids had been taking from school. He was going to make her tell him exactly where they had taken them.

"Keep it together." John grabbed his wrist. "We have the advantage here. They don't know about Stiles, taking him was the biggest mistake they could have made."

"Can Derek get to him?" Peter wondered while he was calculating in his head when Derek would come for Stiles. Three or four hours, he still didn't know the exact amount of time Stiles had but it was enough to get home to John's house after school and to drive out to the lake a bit later so that Derek didn't have to come for him.

"Yes," John answered grimly. His expression made Peter think of the first time Derek had visited him in his bathroom. "Stiles can't run from him. Wherever he's now, Derek will find him and bring him back to the lake."

"Any chance to send Derek after him now?" Peter asked. "Because it's still a few hours." A lot could happen in a few hours. Stiles would heal once he was back with Derek, physically at least. And they still would have to find Boyd and Erica.

"It's not easy to get his attention if you're not in the lake." John made a face, he didn't like it either. "And going in there? He'll most likely drown you before you can say a word to him."

"Stiles mentioned something like that." Derek hadn't killed in years, he wouldn't be able to resist, Stiles had stressed that point. "So, Kate?"

"In a second." John pulled something out of his pocket. Stiles' phone. "Take this. If we don't find them in the next few hours I want you to drive out to the lake. I expect a call from Stiles."

"Of course." Peter took the phone. Stiles would be able to tell them where the hunters were hiding and where to find Boyd and Erica but he got that that was not the first thing on John's mind. Stiles had been abducted before, pretty much like today. Just talking about what had happened back then had given him flashbacks, Peter did not want to think about what this would do to him.

Together they walked back to the main building, they needed to talk to Kate.

"Thank you for letting me be part of the investigation," Peter said because he really appreciated that. It was not a given.

"I need you on this," John admitted. "And it's not as if I can stop you from investigating on your own. Better combine forces right from the beginning. Plus, I don't know for how long Parrish will let me be part of the investigation, Stiles is my nephew after all." He let out a sigh.

Right on cue said deputy came over to them.

"The van is stolen," he informed the sheriff with a side-eye on Peter. "Three weeks ago in Sacramento. We're looking for it."

"Thanks, Parrish." John hadn't slowed down for him and Parrish had to hurry to keep up with them.

"Sir." He tried to get the sheriff's attention. "What about that man from the other day? Shouldn't we put out a warrant for him?"

"I doubt he has something to do with this," John dismissed him.

"He was seen with Stiles under suspicious circumstances," Parrish tried to reason with him. "And he escaped custody before we could identify him. At this point, we should look in every direction."

Now John did stop and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Okay, put a warrant out for him," John decided to which Parrish turned on his heel to do that right now.

"Derek?" Peter asked. He'd heard the story of Parrish arresting him.

"Parrish is obsessed with him," John said. "Under different circumstances, he would be right, Derek would be a suspect."

"As long as he's looking in that direction he won't question what you're doing," Peter pointed out because officially John didn't have a reason to question Kate Argent. She was a teacher of Stiles' but not of Boyd or Erica.

They found Kate with her class in the parking lot with all the other classes. School was cut short for today but so far John hadn't let anybody go home.

Peter spotted Isaac in the crowd. He looked lost among his friends.

"I will find them," Peter promised under his breath. Too low for John to hear who was right next to him but easy enough for Isaac to pick up. Isaac gave him a grim nod.

Cora was in Kate's class but she was standing on the outskirts, all by herself.

"Uncle Peter." She came over to him when she spotted him. "What happened? They say that Boyd, Erica, and Stiles got abducted."

So it had already made the round what had happened, Peter was not surprised.

"That's true," Peter confirmed. "Sheriff Stilinski will bring them back, Stiles is his nephew after all."

Cora knew that the last part wasn't true but Boyd and Erica were not blood-related to them either and still they would move heaven and hell to get them back. Peter hoped that she understood that John would do the same for Stiles.

"Kate Argent?" John had already found the woman in question and Peter hurried to catch up with him.

When she spotted him, she managed to keep her features under control but her heart-beat gave her away.

Surprise, Peter thought. *The werewolves are working with the Sheriff.* He gave her a toothy smile while John asked her to follow them somewhere more private.

"I'm not sure how I would be able to help," Kate said once they were in her classroom.

"You can see the bleacher from here." John was looking out of the window. "Have you seen what happened?"

"I'm sorry." She shook her head. "I was grading some assignments."

"You are lying," Peter said when he noticed her heart skipping a beat.

"I'm sorry, who is this?" She kept up the act. "Can I see your badge?"

She was enjoying this.

Peter felt a growl deep in his throat but he swallowed it down.

"This is Peter Hale," John introduced him. "But I think you know that. And I think you also know that the two teenagers who were abducted right over there …" He pointed out of the window before he came over to where she was leaning against her desk without a care in the world. " … are members of his pack." He kept a close eye on her expression but even Peter who was standing a few feet away caught her eyes widening in surprise at that word.

"You crossed a line here," John said, his voice stone-cold. "You have no idea what you've brought onto yourself when you took my nephew."

Chapter 41

"Well, that was not helpful at all," Peter said when they left the school building. The lot had cleared, the deputies had allowed everybody to go home, but there were still people lingering around. Cora and Isaac for example who were standing together and talking quietly to each other. Peter should go over to them.

"And now they know that you know," Peter added after a second.

"Might scare them a bit," John said grimly. "If we don't find them before Derek comes to get Stiles, they're in for quite a surprise. Derek is going to kill whoever is holding Stiles."

"You sure you want to find them before that?"

"I don't want Stiles to be at their mercy for longer than necessary," John said, a dark shadow clouding his eyes. Even if Stiles only was collateral damage, they didn't know what the hunters were doing to him. He wasn't a werewolf, he should be safe but Peter didn't want to bet money on that.

And since they were werewolves, Boyd and Erica most certainly were not safe. The hunters hadn't killed them immediately so there was hope that they were still alive but Peter had no illusions about how the hunters were treating them. The electrical wiring came to mind.

"Officially I have no reason to suspect Kate," John said after a long moment. "I take you have eyes on her?"

"On her and her brother," Peter confirmed. "And I'll get everybody on high alert for those other hunters."

"I have to go back to the station, see if Parrish has anything on the van yet," John said. "And I'm going to send somebody over to your house. Talk to your family, set up everything in case the kidnappers call, you know the drill." John rubbed a hand over his mouth. He was trying to stay professional but this was getting to him. Not that Peter felt any different, Boyd and Erica were pack. And Stiles was … his boyfriend? Peter didn't know if that was the right term but Stiles was important to him.

"Keep me updated." John was already heading over to his cruiser.

"Same to you," Peter called after him.

"I'm waiting for that call." With that, John got into his car and Peter turned to his two pack members now coming over to him.

"You're working with the sheriff?" Isaac asked. There was no way that he hadn't heard their conversation.

"Yes," Peter confirmed the obvious. "This is not just about us, his nephew got abducted as well."

"And you told him …" Isaac made a vague gesture, they were in public after all and even if the parking lot was not crowded any longer it was still far from being empty.

"He already knew." Peter threw a glance at Cora. She knew that Stiles was not quite human either, it shouldn't come as a surprise to her that the sheriff was in the know about the supernatural but she

was lost in thoughts with her thumb between her lips, nibbling at the skin.

"What are we going to do now?" Isaac asked, bouncing with restless energy.

"You two are going home," Peter said firmly. "I know you want to help but I don't want anybody wandering off. I already have people out there and the deputies are also looking for them. We will find them." He fixed Isaac with a stern look. "But I can't do that if I have to worry about the rest of you. So go home."

They didn't like it but eventually, Cora got into the car with Isaac and together they drove off. Peter got in his car as well to give Talia a call. She didn't know yet.

She took it as well as expected. It took Peter a few moments to talk her out of alpha mode. She'd been about to just go and rip the Argents apart but once she had herself under control again, they agreed that Talia would go home to inform the pack while Peter would keep looking for their missing pack members.

"Even if neither I or the sheriff find them, Derek will," Peter reminded her.

They ended the call and Peter immediately dialed another number. He had to get some things in motion.

Twenty minutes later all his contacts were informed and were actively looking for the van, the hunters, and the missing teenagers. If one of those showed up anywhere in town, Peter would know.

With that taken care of, Peter was pondering what to do next. It was tempting to pay Chris Argent a visit but he doubted that he would give him more information than his sister. The Argents' house might even be a trap, he better left it to John to question Chris.

So Peter got out of the car and walked back to the bleachers. There had been a lot of people here by now but Peter was still able to catch a hint of pack. Boyd and Erica had been out here quite often, their scent still lingered.

Keeping his senses open, Peter walked over to the tree line. According to Scott, one of the attackers had come running from here. John and at least two of his deputies had been out here as well but there weren't that many scents interfering. Peter closed his eyes and focused on the scent. He followed the trail back to where the men had been waiting for their victims. If they had left any physical evidence like the proverbial cigarette butt it was already in evidence bags at the station but that was not what Peter was interested in anyway.

There had been two men, they had been waiting here for quite a while. Most likely not for the first time.

Peter couldn't follow the van but when he went back to his car, he had the scents of the two men memorized. Not that that did him any good since he had no idea where to look for them.

There was not much Peter could do so he drove home. By now everybody was there and when he entered the living room, all eyes were on him.

"Anything?" Walter asked in the name of everyone.

Talia had already told them the basics but Peter gave them all a short recap of what had happened and that he and the sheriff were both working on finding the missing teenagers. That the sheriff's nephew had been abducted as well was a fact they hadn't known before, Talia had left that little

detail for Peter to tell, and it raised the question why hunters would take a random teenager as well. Maybe it wasn't the hunters after all? But who else would just kidnap three teenagers?

"They used tranq darts to knock out Boyd and Erica but Stiles got hit over the head," Peter pointed out. "They knew what they were doing. Most likely Stiles was just in the way."

"Why didn't they just leave him, then?" Deborah asked which led to a heated discussion about the reason behind that decision.

Peter and Talia used the chance to excuse themselves to the library, they had to discuss what to do next. Peter's phone had stayed stubbornly silent and he was out of leads. The only thing he could do was to go out to the lake and wait for Stiles to show up. Maybe he could get Derek's attention so that he would go after Stiles earlier.

In the meantime Talia would keep the pack together, nobody was allowed to go anywhere alone.

"I hate it when the only thing I can do is wait." Talia was pacing up and down the room. "You think they'll call? Asking for a ransom?"

"I doubt it but John wanted to send somebody over, just in case." A stranger in the den during times of stress was not a good idea but Peter understood that it was necessary.

When they came back downstairs two deputies had already arrived. One was talking to Anthony, the other one was collecting all the phones. Peter ducked out through the back door before they spotted him, he did not have the time to play twenty questions with them. Talia would handle the situation just fine without him, she was the diplomatic one after all.

With all the deputies busy nobody was patrolling the road leading to the lake. At least that.

Peter checked the cabin but Stiles wasn't there and it didn't look as if anybody had been here since they had left in the morning. Which felt like it had been ages ago.

"Derek!" Peter yelled over the lake but except for a startled bird, he got no response. He called out for him a few more times but the lake stayed silent with only a few ripples on the surface. It looked peaceful but Peter was not in the mood for peaceful.

He knew it was dangerous, the pier looked as if it was just waiting for a stiff breeze to fall apart, but Peter carefully walked out to the end.

"Derek!" He yelled again but still didn't get an answer. He waited for another minute before he made his way over the rotten planks back to dry land. Falling into the lake would get him Derek's attention, that was for sure, but he was not suicidal.

Peter checked the time. Still at least an hour before Stiles' time was up. He didn't like it but the only thing he could do now was to wait.

He went back to the cabin, dragged s chair outside so that he had the lake in good view, and then he settled in for a long wait. He spent most of the time on his phone, asking for updates and coordinating the search, but there was still no news.

Peter sensed that something was happening seconds before the first bubbles disturbed the calm surface. He was on his feet and at the waterline by the time a head broke through.

Boyd. A second later Erica surfaced right next to him.

That was not what he'd expected but Peter took it.

"Over here," he called out and waved his arm when they just had a disorientated look around.

"Stiles!" Erica yelled, frantically looking around. When she didn't find him, she took a deep breath and went under again.

"Boyd!" Peter yelled again. "Get out of the water."

"Stiles, he was with us." At least Boyd acknowledged him but he too made no attempt to get closer to the shore. He was looking around and then he dove in again.

"I can't find him!" Erica was back up to catch a breath but was about to go under again.

"Erica!" Peter bellowed with his eyes flashing. "Get out of the water. Now!"

"I have to find him." She made a few strokes towards him out of reflex alone but she was still searching for Stiles.

"He's fine!" Peter told her even if he didn't have a clue if it was true. "Come here!"

Reluctantly she came closer, still not convinced, but at least she was able to stand now, the waterline just above her navel.

Boyd hadn't surfaced yet and Peter was about to dive in himself to search for the beta when he came back up.

"Where the hell is he?" He muttered to himself.

"Boyd!" Peter shifted to roar the beta into submission if necessary. "Get out of the water!"

Behind Boyd a third person surfaced but it was not Stiles.

"Where's Stiles?" Boyd asked Derek, completely oblivious to the danger he was in. "What did you do to him?"

"Boyd, get away from him." Peter could tell that Derek was trying to hold back but it was more than obvious that he wouldn't be able to restrain himself for long.

Finally, it seemed to sink in that they were in real danger and both Boyd and Erica hurried to get on dry land. Derek stayed back, still hip-deep in the water, but he visibly relaxed once the others were out of his reach.

"Thank you for getting them out." Peter breathed out in relief. "Stiles is under?"

"He's hurt badly." Derek nodded.

Peter had expected that much but hearing it still hurt.

"I'll leave his phone in his cabin, John is waiting for a call from him." Peter paused, feeling Boyd's and Erica's eyes on him. He had some explaining to do in a second here. "And so do I."

Derek gave him another nod.

"Can you tell me where they've been?" Peter asked because he doubted that the betas would be able to give him an answer to that.

"Not in terms you can understand." Derek shook his head. "Stiles needs me." With that, he stepped back until the water closed over his head.

"What the hell is going on?" Erica asked. "Where's Stiles? And who the fuck was that? How did he bring us here? Wherever here is." She had a look around.

"Let's go inside, you can warm up and tell me exactly what happened." Peter ushered them over to the cabin.

"We want some answers as well." Boyd looked over the now calm lake but reluctantly followed them to the cabin.

Chapter 42

"We can't leave them here." Stiles was barely conscious, hanging in Derek's arms, and if it hadn't been for Erica calling out to Derek, he would have forgotten about the others. Everything hurt and he just wanted to sink to the bottom of the lake, sink into Derek, and forget about the pain. But now Stiles lifted his head and blinked with his good eye over to where the two werewolves were still hanging by the chains.

"I don't know who you are or how you got here but don't leave us here, man," Boyd pleaded through gritted teeth, there was still high voltage running through his body, making his muscles spasm.

"We have to take them with us," Stiles told Derek who on his own wouldn't have spared the werewolves a second thought. But with some prompting from Stiles, Derek carefully lowered him to the ground, which his broken ribs and dislocated shoulder did not like, and stepped over to the controls.

One touch with his watery hand and the lights went out. In the sudden darkness, Stiles was unable to see anything but his vision had been blurry at best anyway. Judging by the sound of falling chains, however, the werewolves were free now.

"I can't tell how many there are," Erica whispered from where Stiles thought were the stairs.

"We're not going up there." Stiles scrambled up to a more sitting position. He bit back a scream when something sharp shifted in his chest. Punctured lung sounded fun, the highlight of this crappy day.

"It's the only way out." Boyd's voice came out of the darkness. Slowly Stiles' eyes were adjusting to the poor light, he was able to make out his silhouette against the darkness. "Except for wherever he came from. Who are you anyway?"

"And what did you do to that hunter?" Erica asked.

Stiles tasted blood in the back of his throat and he was breathing shallowly, if due to the approaching panic attack or if he really had a punctured lung he didn't know, maybe it was just because of the broken ribs, but he was more than ready to leave all of that behind.

A wet hand curled around his torso and immediately Stiles sank into Derek's strong arms.

"I'll take you with me," Derek said to the werewolves. "When we're there, swim to the surface and get out of the lake as fast as you can."

"What do you mean?" Erica asked but Stiles already felt the pull.

"Take a deep breath," Derek said and Stiles closed his eyes, just a second now. He felt the familiar rush through the pipes and then he was sinking to the bottom of the lake. With a sigh, Stiles let got.

Derek was with him but after just a few seconds he left.

"Don't." Stiles reached for him but Derek was already gone.

Distantly he remembered Boyd and Erica and a part of him wondered if they had made it out of the lake before Derek came after them but he was sinking fast and nothing was important any longer.

At some point, Derek was back but Stiles couldn't tell if it had been minutes or hours.

"Did you kill them?" Stiles asked. He didn't want Derek to kill anybody. Not because he particularly cared about the werewolves, he was more worried about Derek. Stiles had already forced him to kill a hunter, not that Derek had needed much encouragement, one look at Stiles and he'd been more than ready to kill that man, Stiles didn't want to burden him with more deaths.

"Peter got them out of the water quick enough." Derek curled around him.

"Peter's here?" Stiles perked up, tempted to go up to the surface, but that move alone sent sharp lances of pain through his whole body. When Derek pulled him back, Stiles sank with him without resistance. Peter had to wait.

"He left your phone in your cabin," Derek mumbled into his ear. "He and John are waiting for your call."

"In a bit." Stiles snuggled closer and let go completely.

When Stiles came to again, he felt good. His body had regenerated itself, there was no pain not even a lingering ache in his bones. Derek didn't stir when Stiles wound himself out of his embrace which was good. Stiles didn't want to talk about what had happened and for sure he didn't want to face Derek's guilt. At least this time Derek didn't kill some innocent teenager, maybe that helped.

It was dark when Stiles broke through the surface. If it was still the same day or a week later, he couldn't tell but he was in no hurry to find out. He had to call John and Peter, just to let them know that he was okay, but he feared their questions. He did not want to think about what had happened. Just thinking that he didn't want to think about it let cold sweat break out on his skin.

Stiles hurried to get out of the water and into his cabin, he needed to change into dry clothes. However, he doubted that the cold he was feeling in his bones was because of the cold water.

Once he was dressed, Stiles crawled under the blankets and checked his phone. Past eleven but it was still the same day.

I'm topside, he wrote to John. He kind of hoped that it would be enough but of course a second later his phone rang with John's name on the display.

"Stiles, thank God," John said the second Stiles answered. "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine." Stiles clung to the phone pressed to his ear. Suddenly his chest felt tight and he had to blink against the tears. "Are Boyd and Erica alright?"

Sensing that Stiles was not ready to talk about it, and he loved John for that, John told him what had happened while Stiles had been under.

Boyd and Erica were safe and sound, a bit shaken but back in the safety of their pack and John was confident that they would recover quickly. However, Peter had to tell them about Derek and with that about Stiles as well but Stiles should ask Peter about the details. Stiles wanted to text him next anyway.

The good news was that one of Peter's contacts had found the place where the hunters had taken them. The van had still been in the driveway of the hunting cabin they had used.

"We found the body," John said. "The hunters must have left in a hurry when they noticed that you and the others were gone and that one of them was dead."

"Must have freaked them out." Stiles chuckled to himself but it felt forced.

"Do you want to come over?" John asked. "Or I can come out to the cabin."

It was tempting. Stiles didn't want to be alone, not tonight. But John was not the person he wanted to have around right now.

"I would rather have Peter here tonight," Stiles admitted after a long second. "If that's okay with you."

"Of course," John agreed quickly, maybe a bit too quickly. "He's worried about you."

"Can I come over tomorrow?" Stiles asked in a small voice. Not long ago John had been the person he would have come to. He didn't want that to change, John was still the most important person in his life, not counting Derek, but Peter had become a close second and at the moment he was the one he needed more.

"Stiles." John let out a fond sigh. "You can come over anytime, you know that. I'm just glad that you're okay. If you need Peter more than me tonight, that's okay. I'm here for you, that will never change."

They had never been big on words but Stiles heard the *I love you* behind those words.

"Thanks, Dad."

Now it was John who was choking on tears but Stiles ended the call with a good feeling.

Stiles took a moment to collect himself before he shot Peter a message. If he could come over? Stiles wasn't sure if he would even see his message, maybe he was already sleeping. What if Peter couldn't come over? Or didn't want to? Stiles didn't want to be alone tonight but he would not crawl back to John after he'd declined his offer. He was not that desperate.

However, a second later Peter answered: *On my way*.

Stiles let out a breath.

Should I bring food? Peter asked.

Stiles couldn't even remember when he'd last eaten, breakfast most likely but that had been ages ago. Being under put things like that on hold, he didn't need to eat or sleep while he was under, but now he was craving something sweet.

Bring sugar, he wrote. *Lots of sugar.*

Stiles put the phone away and drew the blanket over his head, maybe he could get warm until Peter was here. He made himself as small as possible, slung his arms around his knees, and closed his eyes. It helped with the shaking but the cold was still deep in his bones and with nothing else to occupy his mind, his thoughts circled back to earlier. Boyd and Erica going down and the hunter coming for him. Stiles had known what would happen seconds before the man had knocked him out.

Just like then. Knocked out. And when he'd woken up, he'd been bound and helpless. At least this time he'd only been beaten to pulp and not drowned, that was better, right?

"Stiles?"

The heap of blankets dipped when Peter sat down next to him.

Stiles had his back to him with the blanket over his head and he was not ready to change that.

Peter put a hand on his shoulder but didn't force him to turn around.

"I was worried," Peter admitted.

"Don't want to be alone," Stiles mumbled into his knees.

"You don't have to."

The hand on his shoulder was a heavy weight, grounding, comforting.

"The ice cream is melting," Peter said out of nowhere. "Do you want some or shall I put it in the freezer?"

"Maybe later." Ice cream sounded good but for that, he would have to unfold.

"Be right back." The hand left his shoulder and a second later Stiles heard the door of the fridge. It was only a small one, he didn't need much out here, but it had a small freezer.

With the ice cream taken care of, Peter was back at his side but instead of sitting down again, he stretched out behind Stiles and tugged at the blanket until he could slip under it. Spooning Stiles from behind he slung his arm around him.

"Okay?" Peter asked and when Stiles nodded, he drew him close until Stiles' back was pressed against his chest.

"You're warm," Stiles mumbled when the warmth started to seep into his back.

It took a few minutes but eventually, Stiles uncurled until he was lying stretched out in Peter's arms.

"He didn't ask Boyd or Erica any questions," Stiles broke the silence. "He wanted to know about my connection to the pack but in the end, he didn't care. He just wanted to hurt me." It was so pointless.

"They wanted Boyd and Erica." Peter pretended to not feel the sobs shaking Stiles' whole body for which Stiles was grateful. "We think they took you just because you were there."

"Figured that much." It still hurt. They had abducted and tortured him just because he'd been at the wrong place at the same time. "Story of my life."

"They made a big mistake taking you." Peter's breath ghosted over his neck. "One of them drowned in that basement and they don't have a clue what happened."

"Derek tends to leave that impression." Stiles couldn't help the smile tugging at the corner of his lips. He rolled to his back to which Peter propped himself up on his elbow, looking down on him.

"Did you bring more sugar than ice cream?" Stiles asked. He wanted sugar and he didn't want to talk about this any longer.

"I have chocolate," Peter offered. His eyes were in the shadows but the way he was looking at Stiles … Stiles bathed in that gaze. He doubted that Peter was looking at anybody else like this.

"Kiss me," Stiles demanded. "And then feed me chocolate."

Peter studied him for a moment longer but then he leaned in and brought their lips together. It was gentle, almost chaste, and over way too quickly. But then Peter was back with chocolate which he fed to him piece by piece. Stiles moaned around the sweet goodness in his mouth and the next kiss they shared was way more heated and full of chocolate.

Chapter 43

With Boyd and Erica sitting at Stiles' small table, wet and freezing and still glancing out to the lake where Derek had disappeared just a minute ago, and Stiles hadn't even surfaced, Peter realized that he had to come clean. Boyd and Erica would insist on some answers and with them, four people of his pack would be in the know. There was no way to keep Stiles a secret any longer. And if Peter was honest, he wanted to openly be with Stiles without worrying what others might think. He couldn't change what a random stranger on the street might think but he wanted the acceptance of his pack.

"That was Derek, the local lake creature." Peter closed the door, cutting off the line of sight to the lake.

"Derek the what?" Erica asked. She was shaking but more because she was still dripping wet and that it was not summer any longer. Peter went over to the stove to get a fire going. It would heat up the cabin and a hot tea might be a good idea as well. He hoped that Stiles didn't mind.

"There are towels over there." Peter pointed over his shoulder while he piled wood in the stove. "And blankets. You should get out of your wet clothes."

While they did that, Peter called John. He figured that John did not want to take Boyd and Erica's statement at the station. There was no way they could talk freely about how they escaped if the recording went into the official file. Like expected, John was on his way a second later.

"The sheriff's coming here?" Boyd asked. He and Erica were down to their underwear and wrapped in some of Stiles' blankets.

"And what was that with the lake monster?" Erica came back to her earlier question.

"I'm going to explain this to the whole pack later so I'll just give you the cliff-notes for now." Peter set a pot on the stove to get some water boiling for the tea. He felt like the occasion called for something stronger but surprisingly Stiles didn't have any alcohol in his cabin.

While they waited for the water to boil, Peter gave them the short version of how the Hale pack had come to an arrangement with the local lake creature. How the alpha of that time not only fucked over Derek but Stiles as well. That it was the reason the Hales didn't go to the lake.

"Stiles is the guy you're seeing," Erica realized.

"Yes." Peter set the steaming mugs of tea in front of them. Both immediately closed their hands around their mug to let the warmth seep into their palms. "I didn't want to make it public right away because of how young Stiles looks and because of his complicated relationship with the Hales. When we first met, he was way too happy when he thought that I killed one of the Hale pack." Peter couldn't help a fond smile at that memory.

"Do I want to know why he thought that you killed somebody?" Boyd muttered.

"Oh, I did kill somebody that night," Peter said, the fond smile turning into something more predatory. "Stiles just misunderstood who the Hale was."

"Of course." Boyd looked as if he regretted his question.

"So, Stiles is at the bottom of the lake right now?" Erica glanced out of the window.

"He has to go under as he calls it from time to time." Peter nodded. "He heals while he's down there."

"I believe that when I see it." Erica glared at him, not convinced.

"Fair enough."

"And the sheriff knows about him?" Boyd asked.

"I don't know how they met or when Stiles told him but he's known about Stiles for years." Peter perked up when he caught the noises of a person coming down the path. "And with that, he's known about us as well."

Right on cue, the door opened and John entered the cabin. He had a look around, to assess the potential threat, no doubt, he was an officer of the law, but mainly he was looking for Stiles, Peter guessed.

"He's still under?" John asked and closed the door to keep the heat in.

"He didn't come up at all," Peter confirmed to which John nodded. John knew Stiles longer than Peter, he was more familiar with how Stiles' world worked.

"I'd be surprised if he comes up at all today. Maybe not for a few days." He clearly didn't like it but since he couldn't change it, John shook it off and turned to Boyd and Erica.

"You two alright?" He asked, his voice gentle and caring. Boyd and Erica both answered with a nod. "Can you tell me what happened?"

Peter stepped back and let him do his job, he only interfered to ask a question here and there to clarify things.

When Boyd came to the point of when they had woken up in a basement, his eyes did flicker over to Peter to confirm that it was okay to talk freely but John was quicker.

"Peter said that the hunters bought electrical equipment," John filled the moment of hesitation. "That's how they kept you from shifting?"

It still surprised Peter how casual John handled the whole werewolf thing.

"I tried but it hurt so bad." Erica's voice broke. "I couldn't."

"Did they do the same to Stiles?" John asked.

"No." Boyd shook his head. "They knew that he isn't a werewolf."

"What happened then?"

"One of the hunters came downstairs." Erica tried to keep her voice calm but she was shaking with anger. "He beat up Stiles. Badly." Her eyes flashed gold and a growl escaped her throat.

"Hospital bad," Boyd added. "He completely lost it. If that other guy didn't show up ..." He shook his head. "Still don't know where he came from or how he found us."

"Stiles can't stay away from the lake for long," John explained. "When his time is up, Derek comes to bring him back."

"Yeah, he said that he has a curfew," Erica said.

"That Derek guy, he killed the hunter, like he drowned him with his hand or something. And then he got Stiles down," Boyd continued with the story.

"As if we weren't even there," Erica cut in. "If Stiles hadn't told him to get us free as well, I think he would have left us there."

Now John made a face. "Derek doesn't care about anything aside from his lake and Stiles."

"Anyway." Boyd took over again. "Don't know what he did but next thing I know is that we're in the lake, Stiles isn't there, and Peter is yelling at us to get out of the water."

"Derek almost drowned them before they listened," Peter muttered.

"He just saved us, why would he drown us right after?"

"It's his nature," John said. "If you go into the lake, he can and will kill you. He doesn't want to but he can't help it. Stay away from the lake."

Boyd and Erica nodded meekly and crawled deeper into the blankets.

John had more questions, he wanted to know every little detail, but in the end, Boyd and Erica couldn't tell him anything new. They hadn't seen the men who had taken them, except for the one who had tortured Stiles. They couldn't tell them anything about the van or where they had taken them. The basement could have been anywhere.

So, in the end, John thanked them, promised to keep Peter updated, Peter did the same, and then John left.

"This is the weirdest day of my life," Erica said and put her head on Boyd's shoulder.

"Let's go home," Peter decided.

While Boyd and Erica peeled themselves out of the blankets and back into their still damp clothes, Peter brought the cabin back in order. Stiles would kill him if he left it in a mess.

On their way back to his car, Peter called Talia to let her know that the missing pack members were back and to tell her to get the pack together. The teenagers' story needed some explanation from him and he wanted to get it over with.

At least the background story about Stiles and Derek got somewhat lost in what Boyd and Erica had to tell for which Peter was grateful. There were questions, of course there were, and Pamela told Peter in blunt terms to not take advantage of the poor boy but all in all, they were just grateful that Derek had saved their pack members.

"You do know that we want to meet him, right?" Walter spoke for all of them. "Stiles I mean. But Derek as well."

"I need to know that he's alright," Erica said. She was sitting with Boyd on the couch, both huddled together and still with a spooked look on their face. Being surrounded by pack helped but Peter had no doubt that they would need time to process what had happened today.

"He's not a big fan of us," Peter admitted with a glance at Talia. Stiles had freaked out at the mere thought of meeting her.

On the other hand, Stiles had acknowledged that being with Peter would mean being with his pack as well. Stiles had not liked the idea and he would never be best friends with Talia but Peter had hope that he would warm up to the pack eventually.

So far Stiles had only met Cora and they had gotten along. And he'd been the one who'd saved Boyd and Erica by telling Derek to take them with them. Derek on his own would have left them there. Peter wanted to be mad at him for that but he found that he couldn't.

Derek was not human but he wasn't a werewolf either. He might look human but he was not and it wasn't fair to expect him to act like a human. Same way Peter would never be able to act like a human. He was good at pretending but his senses, his needs, and emotions were too different, it was impossible. So no, he couldn't blame Derek. But he would make sure to properly thank Stiles.

While Peter had been lost in thoughts, the conversation had circled back to the hunters. Why had they taken Boyd and Erica in the first place? What were they planning?

Peter didn't participate in the speculations, which grew wilder by the minute, he was just grateful that his relationship with Stiles was not the center of attention.

He still breathed easier when he got a call from one of his contacts that he'd found the van. Peter excused himself and hurried to drive over to the address. He even beat John to it who had the advantage of the flashing lights.

John had brought Parrish who was looking at Peter with a wary eye, still not sure what to think about Peter tagging along. But the deputy didn't protest too loudly and as long as Peter didn't get in the way, he seemed fine with the civilian hanging around.

The hunting cabin was more a remote house with a basement and a second floor. John and Parrish went through the house but when they didn't find anybody, alive that was because there was a body in the basement, they came back to the entrance where Peter was waiting for them. He didn't want to contaminate the crime scene, and he didn't want to give Parrish a reason to kick him out, so Peter had stayed at the door as instructed but he could still use his nose. He caught the scent of the two hunters he'd been looking for. Judging by the heavy imprint they had left in the house, this was the place they had stayed at most of the time, but he also caught the scent of a few others. The two hunters weren't in this alone. And there was a familiar female scent. Kate Argent.

He told John that much while Parrish was busy calling in the coroner and the forensics.

"I think they ran when they found their buddy dead and the hostages gone," John summed up what Peter was thinking. "They knew the van is hot so they left it."

Peter left before the place was crawling with people. There was no hint of what the hunters were planning beyond kidnapping some teenagers and John would keep him updated in case they did find anything.

In hope that Stiles would be there, Peter drove out to the cabin but there was still no sign of him so he went home.

That night everybody stayed up late so when Stiles finally contacted him, most of his pack was still up but they didn't give him a hard time.

"Take care of him." Talia came up behind him when he was raiding their pantry for anything sweet. He came up with two kinds of ice cream and a selection of chocolate.

"I will," Peter promised but he couldn't help the uneasy feeling when he drove out to the lake.

Boyd and Erica were still shaken, Peter kind of feared what he would find at the cabin.

Chapter 44

When Peter entered the cabin and found a shivering heap of blankets, he feared the worst. But it only took a little bit of coaxing until Stiles stretched out next to him. From there it didn't take long until they were exchanging chocolaty kisses.

Stiles had stopped shivering, maybe the sugar actually did help, but there was still a tension in his body which told Peter that Stiles was not okay. He hadn't been okay for a long time but he'd managed. However, Peter had seen how close to the surface the dark things were. It hadn't taken much to throw Stiles off and what had happened today had made it worse.

"What do you need?" Peter asked and fed him another piece of chocolate.

Stiles caught his fingertips playfully between his lips but then he was chewing on the chocolate with a thoughtful expression.

"I don't know," Stiles finally admitted. "I just don't want to be alone."

"I'm here," Peter assured him. "I'll stay as long as you need me."

"What happened while I was under?" Stiles traced a finger along the collar of Peter's shirt. A V-neck, Stiles was very fond of those, Peter had noticed, but at the moment it looked more as if Stiles needed to busy his fingers and was not trying to start something here.

Peter stretched out again and drew him close until they were lying flush together, Stiles' head on his shoulder. Looking up at the ceiling Peter searched for the right words while Stiles kept playing with his collar.

"Derek almost drowned Boyd and Erica," Peter started which got him a snort from Stiles but nothing else. Stiles just kept tracing along his collar bone, too still and quiet, so Peter kept talking. It was more to fill the silence and to keep the thoughts at bay, Peter got that, but he didn't mind. It helped to sort his own mind.

"I had to tell my family about you and Derek," Peter came to the part he dreaded. "Boyd's and Erica's story wouldn't have made sense otherwise."

To that Stiles let out a hum and snuggled more firmly into him.

"I hope that was okay." Peter slung his arms around him more tightly and Stiles just melted into him. Looked like they were still good but Peter needed to hear it.

"You had to tell them sooner or later," Stiles said into his chest. "That or we would have to break up and I don't want that. I kind of like you." At that Stiles craned his neck to look at him.

"I kind of like you as well." Peter used the chance to steal a kiss. He'd never pegged himself for the sappy kind but tonight Stiles needed all the sappiness he could get.

"Why does a guy have to come with a family?" Stiles asked in a suffering tone.

"Your family is a lake creature and the sheriff," Peter reminded him. "You should consider yourself lucky that you only have to deal with a pack of werewolves."

"I think you got the better deal. Derek is totally chill and John loves you. You've been working

together all day."

Stiles had a point there.

"You haven't even met my family," Peter said.

"I've met your alpha and she's scary as fuck," Stiles reminded him. "And Cora is taking after her mother. Can't say much about Boyd and Erica but they were the ones who dragged me out to the bleachers to interrogate me which was the only reason I even got into this whole mess."

"I'm sorry this happened to you." Peter squeezed him gently to get that point across. "But I'm kind of glad that you were with them. I don't know if we would have gotten them back otherwise."

"Not in time." Stiles yawned into his chest.

"In time for what?"

"Dunno. But that guy said that you wouldn't find us in time." Stiles rubbed his cheek against the fabric of Peter's shirt. "No idea what they're planning. Maybe they'll reconsider since one of them is dead now." Stiles let out a low chuckle. "Can you imagine the face of the poor guy who came looking for his buddy?"

Peter had imagined that before and it was still an amusing thought.

"Can we just sic Derek on them?" Peter asked, only half-joking. He didn't know how Derek could find somebody but he didn't have a problem finding Stiles and he had sneaked into Peter's bathroom twice without anybody noticing.

"Tempting," Stiles agreed. "But no."

He'd sounded sleepy just seconds ago but now his voice was sharp and he pushed himself up to look Peter in the eye. "And you won't even suggest it to him, are we clear?"

Now Stiles was the one looking down on him and Peter had to struggle to hold his gaze. For once Stiles' age was visible in his eyes. Old eyes. Eyes that had seen too much.

Peter stopped struggling and broke eye contact. Averting Stiles' gaze he bared his throat. It seemed to be answer enough.

"Derek doesn't like killing." Stiles' voice became soft again. "Fucks him up every time." He paused, thinking. "Today was different, he had a reason to kill that guy. He saw me and he wanted to kill him. Not sure yet how he takes it, though."

"Okay."

With that out of the way, Stiles settled down again.

"I'm tired." He rubbed his cheek against Peter's chest. "But I doubt I'll be able to sleep tonight."

"We can just lie here," Peter offered. "Or I can help you relax. Whatever you want."

"Touch me?" Stiles asked quietly. "Make me feel good?"

"I can do that."

Peter took his time to first undress Stiles and then himself. Stiles was lying in a nest of blankets,

his pale skin in stark contrast to the dark fabric framing his lean body. Peter admired the view for a moment but when he noticed that Stiles started to shiver again, he leaned in for a kiss.

"I won't hurt you," Peter promised. The last person who had touched Stiles had done nothing but hurt him and Peter did not blame Stiles when he flinched when Peter ghosted his fingertips along his flank.

"I'm fine," Stiles insisted. "All healed up."

That was true for his body, Peter could see that, but far from true for his mind. He didn't point that out, though.

Peter started to explore and caress every inch of smooth skin he could reach. This was not about getting off as quickly as possible, an orgasm would be nice for Stiles but it was not the main goal here. Peter wanted to make him feel good, to enjoy the touch without pain and fear.

Stiles wasn't even hard yet, his cock lying soft between his slightly spread legs, but they would get to that. Peter was not in a hurry, they had all night.

"Just relax and let me take care of you," Peter mumbled into Stiles' skin and to his surprise, Stiles did relax under his touch. With a sigh he sank back into the blankets and closed his eyes, willingly putting himself at Peter's mercy.

Peter had not thought that something that simple could be such a turn on for him but he felt his cock stiffening at the sight of Stiles lying bare and open under him, with his eyes closed and his head tilted to bare his throat. Peter doubted that the last part was something Stiles did on purpose but damn, it did something to Peter.

"You're unbelievable, you know that?" Peter sealed his lips over the pulse point. It would be so easy to slice the skin, to rip out his throat but instead, Peter suckled gently at the soft spot until a nice little hickey blossomed under the skin.

Stiles didn't answer. He just let out a content sigh and sank deeper into the blankets, letting Peter do whatever he wanted to do with him.

Peter took his time to lick and suck his way up and down Stiles' front, leaving little marks on his throat and teasing his nipples until Stiles whimpered when Peter flicked his tongue over the hard nub. He dipped into his navel and ran his fingers over his stomach. By now Stiles was hard, his cock standing proud with precome glistering in the slid but Peter bypassed it to caress the insides of Stiles' thighs and to bury his nose in the crease of his hip.

"You smell so good." Peter let his beard scratch over the soft skin with his words, making Stiles' shiver. "I wonder if you taste as good."

With the tip of a finger, he tapped the bead of precome, just the hint of a touch but it made Stiles' erection twitch in need. Peter licked the liquid off his finger.

"You do taste good. You should try it." He gathered some more and brought the pad of his finger to Stiles' lips. Obediently he suckled his own precome off Peter's finger. "Good, isn't it?"

"Please." Stiles finally broke down. He bucked his hips to get Peter's attention back down there but Peter was in no hurry. He kissed Stiles, chasing the taste of him.

When Peter finally took the tip of his erection between his lips, Stiles let out a strangled noise.

Peter gave the shaft the same attention he'd given Stiles' whole body, slowly exploring every inch of it, and it didn't take long to reduce Stiles to a writhing mess. By the time Peter let him come, Stiles was crying with frustration.

"Damn, I needed that." Still heaving Stiles was lying boneless in the crumbled nest of blankets but this time his body was truly relaxed. His eyes were dropping and he looked seconds from falling asleep.

"Think you can sleep now?" Peter stretched out next to him. He was still hard, he hadn't even paid any attention to his own needs but that was okay. But not for Stiles who reached out to close a loose hand around Peter's throbbing shaft.

"I want to fall asleep while you fuck me," Stiles told him and Peter had to take a few deep breaths to not come over Stiles' hand. Stiles let go of him and rolled to his front, legs parted in an invitation.

"I can do that." Peter got himself under control and reached for the lube.

Stiles actually did fall sleep while Peter was lazily fucking in and out of him but Peter kept going, slow and steady, until he spilled his release deep in Stiles. Draped over Stiles' back, Peter lay there for a moment longer, he wouldn't mind falling asleep like this either, still connected to Stiles in the most intimate way possible, but in the end, he gently pulled out and went to clean up. Stiles didn't even stir when Peter wiped off the traces of lube and semen but he did snuggle closer once Peter stretched out next to him again.

"Good night, Stiles." Peter brushed the hair out of Stiles' face before he closed his eyes with a content sigh.

They did not get a good night's sleep. Stiles became restless almost every hour, mumbling and whimpering in his sleep. Only once he actually woke up, with a gasp and flailing arms, Peter got smacked in the face with that. Peter held him until his heart-beat slowed down again and his body started to relax.

"Didn't mean to wake you," Stiles said meekly. He'd calmed down but he didn't sound as if he was about to go back to sleep, though.

"It's okay." Peter held him close. "I'm here."

Eventually, Stiles did fall asleep again but soon he was back to tossing and turning. Peter was almost glad when it was late enough to get up.

"Am I getting breakfast in bed?" Stiles asked. He was still lying naked between the blankets from where he was watching Peter who was trying to make coffee the old-fashioned way.

Peter hadn't bothered with clothes either and he was fully aware that Stiles was ogling his ass but his focus was more on not spilling boiling water over his dick.

"Don't get used to it." Peter threw him a glance.

"Should I go to school today?" Stiles asked out of the blue. "Should I even still go? I mean where is the point? Kate now knows that I'm with you." He paused. "With your pack, I mean, I doubt she knows that I'm with you personally."

"Not today," Peter interrupted the flood of words. "Boyd and Erica are taking today off as well."

"You think Kate will be back in school?" Stiles wondered. "I mean she's kind of busted now. Does she know that she's busted? You said her scent was not fresh, maybe she thinks that it has faded enough, that you wouldn't be able to pick it up."

"We'll see." Peter focused on the coffee and let Stiles' words wash over him.

"You know, I do kind of want to see her face when I show up at school." A dark smile spread over Stiles' face.

Chapter 45

Peter couldn't stay for much longer, his phone was going crazy, but he did stay long enough for breakfast. Which they did have in bed.

"Erica is asking if she and Boyd can come over sometime today," Peter read out one of the messages. "She's still worried about you."

Stiles thought about it for a moment but eventually, he nodded. He couldn't avoid the pack forever and he got that Erica was worried. Last time she'd seen him, he had been unable to stand on his feet, bloody and beaten, and most likely on his way to die from internal bleeding. And then they had lost him in the water. Even with Peter's explanation, it was only natural that they wanted to make sure that he was okay.

"Looks like I'm going to meet your pack one by one." He might manage that way.

"Talia is thinking about inviting you for dinner." Peter killed that hope.

"One thing after the other." Stiles slowed him down. "Boyd and Erica are okay, they can come over this afternoon. I have to see John first."

They finished breakfast and then Peter had to leave but he promised to come by in the evening.

"You don't have to sleep alone."

"I can always go under overnight." Stiles shot back but he was pretty sure that Peter had caught the happy dance his heart had just done at his suggestion. With a knowing smile, Peter left.

Stiles was still lying naked in the blankets and he was not in the mood to change that just yet so he got his phone out and asked John if it was okay if he brought him lunch today. To which he got the prompt answer that lunch was fine but he should be prepared for Parrish who wanted his statement.

Check your emails, I sent you the statements from the others, John wrote. *Make sure yours matches theirs*

I'm pretty sure that's illegal, Stiles wrote back but reached for his laptop. Reading was better on the bigger screen.

He might ask about your parents, John ignored the illegal part.

Why would he ask about my parents?

He has a theory, was all John wrote to that and Stiles let it be for the moment. He would find out once he was at the station.

The statements were pretty straightforward. Boyd had managed to struggle free, then he'd freed Stiles and Erica and together they fled. They hadn't known where they were so they just ran. Stiles got separated from them but Boyd and Erica had stumbled over the cabin at the lake where they'd found a phone and had called Peter. When shown a picture of the dead man in the basement, they both had confirmed that he was one of the kidnappers but he'd been alive when they had left.

Pretty simple but those were the best stories. Stiles wouldn't have a problem, matching his statement to theirs. He deleted the email just in case before he shut down the laptop. He still had

time until he would have to get the lunch he'd promised John so eventually Stiles rolled out of bed and went outside. He wanted to check on Derek before he left.

Sinking to the bottom of the lake felt nice, he had to be careful to not forget the time, but it was a great way to not think too much.

"Derek?" Stiles asked into the silence around him. He could feel Derek's presence but Derek's attention was elsewhere. Stiles felt the shift when Derek answered his call.

"Are you alright?" Derek asked.

"I was about to ask you the same question." Stiles let his mind float, this was nice. "I think I scared Peter with nightmares tonight but he's willing to come back to keep me company over the night."

"I don't think you can scare him off that easily."

"No." Stiles liked that about him. Most people would run once they knew more about him. But most people weren't werewolves and most people wouldn't drag dead bodies through the woods in the middle of the night. "He told his pack. About me. And you."

"Is that a bad thing?" Derek asked, his voice neutral.

"I don't know." Stiles let out a sigh. "He says they're okay with me but I don't know."

"Be careful."

"Aren't I always?"

"No."

"That was a rhetorical question."

They fell silent for a moment but it wasn't uncomfortable, it was familiar.

"I'm sorry you had to kill somebody," Stiles eventually spoke up. "You okay?"

"He hurt you." Derek's voice became dark. "He deserved it."

Stiles left the lake with the good feeling that Derek was not mulling over this one. Quite the opposite, Derek hadn't outright said it but Stiles got the feeling that Kate Argent was in for a surprise visit. Maybe her brother as well. Too bad they didn't have more names.

In the end, Stiles had to hurry to get to the station in time for John's lunch break. He brought sandwiches and coffee, the stuff they had at the station was undrinkable, but he almost spilled it when he saw the mugshots at the entrance. There were two new ones. One was the hunter Peter had on his radar for a while now, that one was expected. The other one was not.

"Why is there a mugshot of Derek hanging out?" Stiles asked once he'd made it past Nancy who had started crying when she spotted him.

"That's part of Parrish's theory." John made grabby hands at the coffee. "I think he takes it personally that Derek escaped custody right under his nose."

Stiles slumped down in the chair in front of John's desk. There was a sandwich for him in the bag as well but he was not particularly hungry.

"How are you holding up?" John eyed him from across the desk but it was more of a fatherly than a sheriffly look.

"Woke Peter with my nightmares at least once," Stiles admitted. "And he told his whole family about me, they're going to invite me for dinner."

"So you're at the meet-the-parents stage?" John let him get away with the change of topic.

"Neither of us has parents." Stiles let his head fall back to look at the ceiling.

They were interrupted by Parrish asking if Stiles could give his statement now. Apparently, it couldn't wait until they had finished lunch.

"Okay, let's get it over with." Stiles stood and followed the deputy to one of the interrogation rooms. To his surprise there even was a social worker or whatever she was waiting for them. He was a minor and his legal guardian was the sheriff who couldn't be present because of a conflict in interest, it made sense. Stiles barely acknowledged the woman, he just wanted to get this over with.

Turned out that Parrish was not that much interested in what happened yesterday, not that Stiles could tell him much anyway. His focus was on Derek, not that he knew him by name. Who was he? What was Stiles' relationship with him? Had he seen him lately?

Stiles told him that Derek was a hitchhiker he'd been stupid enough to pick up.

"I know I shouldn't do something like that but I felt sorry for him, he looked miserable." Stiles played it up. In the beam of Parrish's flashlight, Derek did have looked terrible, there was no denying that.

When that didn't get him anywhere, Parrish changed tactics and asked about Stiles' parents. Boyd and Erica were also not living with their parents so Stiles could see where he was coming from here. He kept it vague, just that he felt so much better living with John now, and eventually, Parrish let him go.

"Hope he didn't give you too much trouble," John said when Stiles fled back to his office.

"I just hope he doesn't try to find my parents." Stiles dropped back into his chair. He eyed the sandwich still waiting for him on the desk but he decided against it.

"Yeah," John made. If Parrish looked too closely at Stiles, things would get complicated.

"I should go before he comes up with more questions. We still good for dinner tomorrow?" Stiles hadn't asked about the still ongoing investigation but for once he didn't want to know. Maybe tomorrow over dinner, after he had some time to clear his head.

They talked for a little while longer, just the usual stuff, dancing around the topic, but it seemed enough to convince John that Stiles was okay. Not okay okay, they both knew that this had brought things back and had piled a new heap of crap on top, but okay enough.

So when John started to glance at the files on his desk, indicating that he had to go back to work eventually, Stiles left with the promise that they would have pizza and garlic bread both dripping with grease tomorrow. It was comfort food and for once Stiles didn't want to worry about John's arteries. John shooed him out of his office with a fond smile.

Back in the solitude of his cabin Stiles tried to dig into his book but his mind was too restless for that.

Stiles just needed to close his eyes and he was back in that basement. It was a fucked up mix, one second he remembered clearly his ribs cracking, the next one his mind insisted that he was drowning. As long as he was awake, he could keep the two things apart, mostly, but he remembered enough of his nightmares to fear the night.

It came as a relief when Boyd and Erica knocked at his door.

"Hey." Erica waved awkwardly at him but then she seemed to say *fuck it* and caught him in a tight hug. "We were worried about you. When you didn't come up …" She didn't finish the sentence and just hugged him more tightly.

"I can't drown and for sure not in this lake." Stiles wound himself out of Erica's arms and gestured for them to come in. "Heard Peter told you about that."

"He did." Boyd closed the door and had a look around. He had been here before, Stiles knew that, but then it had been just a cabin. Now they knew that it was his.

"So this is where you live?" Erica stepped farther into the room which only took a few steps, the cabin was small.

"It's small but it's mine," Stiles confirmed. His bed wasn't made and he was pretty sure that the scent of him and Peter was still heavy in the air but neither of the werewolves pointed it out. There were still dishes in the sink and he couldn't remember when he'd cleaned the last time but he would not let them talk down on his cabin. It was his.

"Most of the time I'm with Derek," Stiles added. "And lately I'm more at John's place. Since I'm supposed to be living there and all that." He wasn't sure if he should keep up with the farce, the hunters knew about him now, but he didn't know how much they knew. And he would most likely get John in trouble if he didn't show up at school. Stiles had not thought about how to get out of this once the hunters were gone. Which they weren't so he guessed he would just keep going.

"Where is Derek?" Erica peeked out of the window but there was only the lake outside.

"At the bottom of the lake."

"And you have to join him there?" Boyd asked.

"Yeah." Stiles made and gestured for them to take a seat. Looked like he still had some explaining to do. However, Boyd and Erica were both bitten werewolves, they could relate to the sudden change of nature and how hard it was to adjust. Their experiences were quite different but similar enough. To Stiles' surprise, they spent over two hours just talking and it felt good.

"Cora says that Kate Argent is still teaching as if nothing has happened." Erica brought them back to the initial topic.

"Can't wait to see her face when she sees me in class tomorrow." Stiles gave her a feral grin which she matched with an equal one but with a little more teeth.

"We're going back to school tomorrow, too," Boyd added and after a moment he asked if they should pick up Stiles, facing school together.

That's how Stiles ended up in a car with four werewolves the next morning. It was a tight fit and he found himself squished between Isaac and Cora. Stiles hadn't really met Isaac before but he didn't bug him with questions on the ride so Stiles decided that he kind of liked him. Cora was a bit annoying, talking to him as if they were old friends but Stiles stayed polite. Mostly.

Stiles still did have lunch with Scott, though. There was a limit to how much werewolf he could tolerate in a day.

Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

> Sorry for skipping last week's update. Real life and Camp NaNo are killing me, I'll have to skip next week's update as well. However, I finished writing this story, I might be able to post more often soon.

Peter did not get a chance to see Kate Argent's reaction to Stiles being back in her class but he got to witness Chris Argent's face when he spotted Derek's mugshot. He tried to glare it to death.

Peter was at the station to talk to John right when Chris came in to give his statement. There had been gunshots at his place last night and a neighbor had called it in. Peter doubted that Chris would have bothered with reporting the intruder otherwise.

"So, Derek paid the Argents a visit?" Peter couldn't help the smug grin when he watched Parrish leading Chris into an office.

Chris had spotted him as well but they had already established that Peter was working with the sheriff, no point in hiding that fact. It might even do them some good if the hunters knew that the pack had a good standing with the department.

"Chris said last night that he was shooting at an intruder but that he didn't get a good look at him," John told him with a glance at where Derek's mugshot was hanging. "Kate hasn't reported anything."

"All sides prefer to keep the authorities out," Peter admitted.

"Not that I could do much anyway." John agreed. "It's not as if I can arrest Derek."

"Maybe he spooked them enough to make them rethink their next actions," Peter mused but he had little hope. Kate was more of a fight than a flight person.

Later that day, when Peter came out to the lake, Stiles confirmed his impression.

"How was school?" Peter prompted.

"She tried to threaten me." Stiles came right to the point.

They had made themselves comfortable on the pile of pillows and blankets Stiles called a bed.

"Said that I should stay out of her business or else." Stiles shrugged. "Tried fishing for information on Derek."

"In context with Derek, *fishing* gives some interesting images." Peter tried to gloss over the fact that Stiles was now on Kate's radar.

"I suddenly remembered why I hate the Hales." Stiles gave him a dirty look.

"I have intel that you are quite fond of one particular Hale."

"Isaac's not a Hale."

"Touche." Peter leaned back and let his head fell against the wall. He liked this. The easy banter with Stiles. "He must have left quite an impression when they picked you up this morning."

It had come as quite a surprise that Stiles had agreed to getting in a car with four werewolves. Peter wanted the teenagers to stick together as much as possible but he had not expected that they would include Stiles like that.

"Hope Erica didn't force you into this." Peter became more serious. "She can be quite pushy."

"I like her," Stiles assured him. "But no, it's okay."

Stiles stretched out his legs and scooted closer until his shoulder touched Peter's. "And this way I get to know all the young ones first. That's way better than to get thrown into the whole pack at once."

Stiles had a point there and Peter couldn't say how relieved he was that Stiles got along with the younger members of his pack. Aside from Cora they were all bitten, they knew how it felt to be the new one in a tight-knit pack.

Stiles could be pack and Peter kind of wanted him to be pack, he wanted his mate to be part of what was an integral part of his life, but he understood that Stiles didn't want that. Maybe over time. If anything they had time. At least until Peter grew old. Would Stiles still want him if he was an old man? If he even lived long enough to grow old. Out of the pack, the left hand was the one most likely to die young.

"You haven't met Emily yet," Peter reminded the youngest member of his pack.

"We could change that when you take her to her guitar lesson on Friday," Stiles offered after a long second. Last Friday Peter hadn't left to go to the library, he'd hung around until her lesson was over. This week he was even less keen on leaving Emily anywhere alone.

"We can pick you up on the way," Peter agreed easily to not make a big deal out of the fact that Stiles had just offered to meet another member of his pack. "You can keep me company while I wait for her lesson to be over."

"After that it's only the adults, right?" Stiles was playing with the blanket, worrying the hem.

"We don't bite."

"You do," Stiles said without missing a beat. "You like to maul my neck when you go feral."

"You like it." Peter shrugged.

Stiles gave him another dirty look but the wave of arousal coming off him was answer enough.

"Let's watch something." Stiles changed the topic and reached for his laptop.

It was late and they both had a long day, they were drifting off to sleep only half-way into the movie. Peter wouldn't mind going to sleep like this but Stiles violently jerked awake every time his head started to drop.

"Do I have to fuck out your lights again?" Peter let out a sigh but when he caught Stiles' heart-beat perking up and the scent of bare need coming from him, Peter felt instantly more awake. He set the

laptop aside, it had mostly slipped off their stretched out legs anyway, and then, with a growl, he swirled Stiles into a lying position. With a yelp, Stiles went down.

Fangs out and his claws digging into Stiles' shoulders Peter was looming over him. Stiles looked up at him with big eyes but there was not a hint of fear in them or his scent. Quite the opposite, his pupils were blown, his breath came out in hot puffs between slightly parted lips, and his scent made Peter dizzy. Stiles had gone from mildly aroused to beyond horny in seconds and Peter felt himself respond to that.

"I'm going to mount you," Peter informed him through his fangs. "I'm going to make you take it. No touching your dick, you're going to come from that alone."

With that, he flipped him over and nudged his legs apart. Peter was bigger when shifted and Stiles whimpered under him when he entered him after only a quick prep but when Peter stilled to give him a moment to adjust, Stiles gritted out a "fuck me" and ground his ass into Peter's groin, taking him even deeper.

Peter didn't have to be told twice, with clawed hands he held Stiles in place and started to thrust.

Stiles came with a strangled cry and not one touch to his rock hard dick bouncing between his legs. With one clawed hand under his front, Peter was holding him in position and didn't stop pounding into the twitching ring of muscles until he followed him over the edge a few thrusts later. He spilled his release deep inside Stiles while his jaws clamped down on Stiles' neck. Peter tasted blood but that only made him come even harder. He felt Stiles weakly twitching around him, a desperate attempt to come again. Riding out his own orgasm, Peter held on to Stiles for a moment longer, before he gently lowered him into the blankets.

"Damn, you're an animal in bed," Stiles mumbled into the fabric. Peter let out a confirming growl before he let his features shift back to human.

Once they were lying warm and cleaned up under the blankets, Peter spooning Stiles from behind, they quickly drifted off to sleep. This time Stiles wasn't fighting it and Peter closed his eyes in hope that they would get a peaceful night.

He woke up to a scream.

Peter was out of bed and ready to defend himself in a heart-beat. Crouched and ready to sink his claws into the attacker, he scanned the room and it took him a long second to realize that he was in Stiles' cabin and that it was Stiles who was screaming in his sleep. There was no attacker.

"Stiles." Peter approached the thrashing mess on the bed but had to duck to not get a fist to the face. The other night Stiles had been tossing and turning, now he was fighting for his life, throwing fists and kicking against the blanket tangled around his legs.

"Stiles!" Peter caught Stiles' wrists and stilled his hands before he broke his hand by hitting the wall. And before he could break Peter's nose.

Stiles was strong and he was trying to break free with all he had. Peter had to shift to keep him under control but in the end, he managed to manhandle him into sitting with his back against Peter's chest. By hugging him from behind Peter pinned Stiles' arms to his torso and a leg thrown over Stiles' kept those in check as well. It was still like wrestling an octopus.

And Stiles kept screaming.

"Stiles," Peter growled into his ear but Stiles was not waking up. "It's okay, you're safe. I got you."

His speech was hindered by too many teeth but Peter hoped that his voice would still be able to reach him.

It didn't.

Peter was about to roar Stiles awake when suddenly the door flew open and Derek stormed in. In the darkness, he was just a dark figure in the rectangle of the door but his eyes were glowing blue. Not the electrical blue with which Peter was looking back at him, Derek's eyes were paler, almost white like the eery lights he'd seen over swamps before.

"Let go of him," Derek said, his voice low, almost gargling. "Now!"

"He's having a nightmare," Peter told him while he still tried to keep Stiles from hurting himself. At least the screaming had died down to little sobs and whimpers. There might even be a "please" mixed in there. Whatever he was dreaming about, Stiles was about to give up and surrender. It broke Peter's heart.

Derek stepped closer, having a real look at what was happening here.

Peter and Stiles were both naked and the smell of blood told Peter that his claws had broken the skin when Stiles had tried to break free. However, his resistance had died down, by now he was only weakly struggling against Peter's hold.

"Stiles," Derek said and crouched down next to them.

When he reached for Stiles, Peter jerked back and tried to protect Stiles' face with his hand.

"No," Peter growled at Derek, the memory of that hand over his mouth and nose way too vivid in his mind.

Derek looked at him with eyes made out of mist and blue fire.

"I'm not going to hurt him," Derek said. At least he seemed to have abandoned the idea that Peter was the one hurting Stiles.

When he reached for Stiles again, Peter allowed it but he was ready to fight Derek off if necessary. Instead of placing his hand over Stiles' airways Derek gently cupped his cheek.

Stiles instantly stopped fighting and with a sigh of relief, he snuggled into Derek's hand. Like always, water was dripping off Derek, giving Peter goosebumps where cold droplets hit his bare skin, but Stiles didn't seem to mind the cold touch. He went lax in Peter's arms.

"Stiles?" Peter asked and dared to melt back into his human form. He had not been able to reach Stiles, he'd been too caught up in his nightmare, but one touch from Derek and Stiles calmed down.

"He's still sleeping," Derek informed him. "I'm taking him with me."

"Don't," Peter said but didn't try to hold him back when Derek lifted Stiles out of Peter's arms.

"There are no nightmares with me," Derek said, the still stark naked Stiles now firmly in his arms. Peter wanted to argue with that but Stiles unconsciously snuggled into Derek's chest.

A stab of jealousy went through Peter's heart at that sight.

Derek, however, seemed done with him and was marching out of the cabin. Peter scrambled to his feet but he let Derek walk out into the lake with Stiles.

Peter stood there for a long minute, watching the now calm surface, but the night was chilly and he was standing here naked so he stepped back into the cabin and closed the door.

It was three in the morning, way too early to get up, but it didn't feel right to crawl back into the nest of blankets.

Deep in thoughts, Peter got dressed and drove home.

The Hale house was dark and quiet at this time of the night but Peter still went through his routine to keep them safe. Then he went upstairs to get an hour or two of sleep before everybody got up. His room was at the far end of the hallway and he took comfort in the heart-beats coming from the rooms he was passing.

There was only silence coming from Cora's room.

Chapter 47

Peter strained his ears. His pack was sleeping all around him and it was never easy to pick out one particular heart-beat in a house full of people but he was quite familiar with the noises in the house, especially at night when everything was quiet, and something was missing.

Peter cracked open the door. Cora was not in her bed.

Dread settled in his stomach. He stepped farther into the room, sniffing the air and straining his ears but he couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. Cora's scent filled the room, it was hers after all, she'd left an imprint on everything, most strongly on the bed and her clothes. There was no sign of an intruder, no sign of a struggle. Peter doubted that anybody would be able to kidnap somebody from the house of a werewolf pack, though.

Derek could, he remembered which brought back the image of Stiles, naked and sleeping in the arms of the water creature.

Peter's eyes fell on the window which wasn't closed properly. He stepped over and opened it fully. This was the second floor but not a problem for a werewolf. Still no sign of anything amiss so Peter closed the window again, leaving it slightly ajar as he'd found it. Then he settled in the chair at Cora's desk and waited.

Cora was a teenager, she had a girlfriend, and Peter, the person who was checking if everything was in order every night, was supposed to be out all night. Peter would be lying if he said that he'd never sneaked out to go to a party or to see somebody. Or to do more nefarious things. He could relate and under other circumstances, he would have just gone to bed and never mention it but there were hunters out there. Boyd and Erica had been abducted just the other day, this was not the time to sneak out. If Cora went missing, nobody would notice for hours.

So Peter sat there and waited for her return.

Which gave his mind the chance to go back to what had happened earlier. Stiles' nightmare. Which had been more of a night terror. His screaming still echoed in Peter's head.

Peter had not been able to reach him. Stiles had been caught up so deep in his nightmare that Peter had not been able to wake him up. However, one touch from Derek had done the trick. Like flipping a switch Stiles had gone from fighting for his life to peaceful sleeping.

Peter knew that Stiles had been with Derek for decades, Stiles called him a friend but their relationship was complicated. Stiles had mentioned what being under felt like but he'd never really tried to explain it and Peter doubted that he could. Or that Peter could understand it.

Peter was still mulling over this when half an hour later a shadow appeared outside the window. Cora slipped into the room and turned to close the window without noticing him.

"Morning," Peter greeted her.

She almost jumped right out of the window again.

Slowly she turned around, looking at the floor.

"Usually we use the door," Peter informed her and got more comfortable in his chair which made her even more uncomfortable. Perks of being the uncle, he hid a grin.

"I can explain …," Cora started but Peter was quicker.

"You sneaked out to see your girlfriend," he stated. It would be amusing to see her struggle through a lie but he was not in the mood for that. This night had been long enough already.

"At least you were smart enough to take care of your scent." He made a point of sniffing the air but there was no hint of another person on her.

"Are you going to tell mom?" She asked, eyes on the floor and fingers fiddling with her sleeve.

Peter let out a sigh and set up straighter.

"No," he said. "And usually I wouldn't care if you sneaked out once in a while, believe me, I did it and for sure your mom did it as well. If she gives you trouble for that, just ask her about Nathan Calmer."

Cora lifted her head with a glint in her eye and Peter knew that she would save that name for the right moment, atta girl.

"However." Peter became more serious. "This is not the time for fooling around like this. We're lucky that Boyd and Erica are alive. One of the hunters is your English teacher. Ever wondered why she wanted to be in your class? You're a target and I can't keep you safe when I don't know where you are."

Cora was back to looking at the floor but she was working herself up to saying something, that much was clear. Peter waited her out.

"What if she's really just an English teacher?" She finally asked. Her heart was beating rapidly now and Peter could smell her anxiety.

"She comes from a long line of hunters," he reminded her. "That's a fact. She's here, her brother is here, and at least two other hunters are here in Beacon Hills as well." One was dead by now but that was not the point. "That's no coincidence."

He fixed her with a stern look. "Derek might have thrown them off for the moment, they didn't expect anything but werewolves here, but they won't back down."

"She said that she doesn't do that anymore," Cora said in a small voice. "That she left the family business."

"You talked to her about this?"

Cora gave him a small nod but then she looked up again and set her jaw.

"She's not like that."

"Don't talk to her." Peter got up, he couldn't sit still for this.

"Sit in her class, hand in your homework but beyond that, don't interact with her. Don't go anywhere alone with her. Stick to Stiles and the others. Keep away from her as much as possible." He'd stepped closer and was now standing right in front of her. He fought the urge to grab her by the shoulders to shake some sense into her.

"She's dangerous."

"You don't even know her." She sounded like the angry teenager she was, all her frustration about

being caught now channeled into this one thing.

"She's a hunter, that's all I need to know," Peter said coldly and turned to leave. He was done with this. "No more sneaking out, you understand me?"

"Says the right one." She called after him. "You did not take care of your scent." Now it was her, sniffing the air.

"Take a deep breath," he told her. "Does that smell as if Stiles had a good time?"

He couldn't smell his own scent but he knew that the lingering traces of sex were over-layered by Stiles' terror.

Her eyes widened when she realized what she was smelling on him.

"He got abducted and beaten," Peter reminded her. "He's not talking about it but Boyd and Erica have seen it, have you seen their eyes? They had to watch when that hunter beat him half to death. And don't forget what they did to them. Being back with the pack helps but they are traumatized."

He gave her a few seconds to let his words sink in.

"Hunters have killed us just because we're werewolves," Peter said. "They will do it again. It's my job to keep us safe and I can't do that if I don't know where you are."

Cora was shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other but she did give him a nod.

"I'm sorry."

"Just don't do it again." Peter let out a sigh, this night had been way too long. "I need a shower. Somebody told me I need to take care of my scent."

It was meant to lighten the mood and it seemed to work.

It was way too late, or too early, to go to bed so after his shower, Peter put on some fresh clothes and went downstairs to start the coffee maker. Since he usually was the last one up in the evening, he came downstairs last most mornings but today he was the first in the kitchen. It was even too early for Walter who was their early bird.

Peter kept his hands busy with getting coffee ready but then he was just leaning against the counter while the machine was doing its thing. Cora was still fresh on his mind and he could only shake his head about stupid teenagers but he hoped that he'd been able to talk some sense into her.

It didn't take long for his mind to wander back to Stiles. How easily he'd responded to Derek. Even in his sleep, caught in a nightmare, Stiles had reacted to him and had been looking for comfort in the hand gently cupping his cheek. Derek had a very distinctive touch, Peter guessed, so Stiles had known that it had been Derek touching him. Peter had just been someone he needed to fight off.

His dark thoughts were interrupted by Walter coming downstairs.

"You're up early," the old man commented from the doorway but when he had a closer look at Peter, he added: "Did you sleep at all?"

"Not really." Peter turned his back on him to fix them their much needed morning coffee. Walter took the cup from him with a wary look but he didn't ask the question clearly on his mind.

Asking Peter what he'd done all night was something everybody in the pack knew not to do. Not

that he would answer honestly or even at all but that alone made clear that he'd been up to no good. What he did for the pack was necessary but most of the members preferred to ignore the dirty work a left hand had to do.

The nights he came home reeking of sex were a different matter, and more frequent lately, but nobody wanted to know about those either.

So they just sat there in comfortable silence, nursing their coffees until the others started to pile in.

Breakfast was not as loud as usual. Boyd and Erica were holding hands under the table and pushing food around their plate without saying much. Cora was grumpy as well and she made a point of not looking at Peter who was just fine with the silent treatment, his mind was swirling with other things.

When everybody got ready to start their day, Peter did wonder if Stiles would be there when the others came over to pick him up but he didn't say anything and just watched the four teenagers getting into the car. Today Isaac was driving with Cora next to him and Boyd and Erica huddled in the back seat. Stiles would fit right in with them. If he was there.

Peter had left his phone in his room but when he went to get it to shoot Stiles a message, he already found one waiting for him.

Sorry, didn't mean to scare you, Stiles had written. *Talk later?*

Since Peter knew that the kids would pick him up any minute now, Peter did not call him and just agreed to talk later. After a long second of consideration, he added: *I was worried*

Instead of an answer, Stiles replied with some hearty eyes.

Peter felt a smile tugging at his lips.

"You got it bad," Talia spoke up behind him. Peter hurried to put his phone away, not that she was able to read the screen from where she was standing. His scent and other signals had given him away.

"I like him." Peter shrugged. He hadn't liked somebody like this since Olivia, he couldn't deny that.

"He's complicated and maybe dangerous."

"That's part of why I like him."

Talia had met Stiles once in a stiff and formal setting, she didn't know him as a person. Peter could tell her that Stiles was not dangerous. At least not to them. He had deliberately used Derek to kill the hunter who had tortured him, Erica had told him that. And Peter remembered his reaction to a dead body. Stiles was not as innocent as he looked. But he was not a threat to the pack.

"What about Derek?" Talia asked. "If you and Stiles argue, if you break up, how would he take it?"

Peter thought about last night when Derek had shown up, thinking that Peter was the one hurting Stiles. Derek had been ready to kill him but he'd backed off immediately when he saw that it hadn't been Peter's fault. Even wolfed out with fangs and claws, Derek had looked into his glowing eyes and had known that Peter was not the bad guy.

"If we don't do something drastic to him or Stiles like trying to kill him, he won't come after us," Peter assured her.

"I hope you're right."

"So do I."

Chapter 48

Stiles woke up at the bottom of the lake, curled into Derek's presence.

"Why am I here?" Stiles asked but didn't feel like moving just yet. The floating was nice.

"You had a nightmare," Derek told him. "I brought you here."

Now Stiles remembered being in the cabin with Peter. The werewolf had fucked him into oblivion but it looked like it hadn't been just lights out after that. Down here, everything was muted and if Stiles wanted to, he could just let go of everything and don't care for a little while. Or a long while, it didn't matter.

"I need to go up," Stiles said but didn't move to do just that. The nightmare was still lingering in the back of his mind. He felt it at the base of his skull, just waiting to dig in its claws again. And not the good digging in of claws Peter had done earlier. Once Stiles would be topside, it would be back full force. Maybe he should sleep down here for a while now. Nightmares didn't reach the bottom of the lake.

However, Stiles needed to go to school. The others would pick him up any time soon, he wasn't sure what time it was but he had the feeling that he should hurry, and he would have to apologize to Peter. Stiles didn't know what exactly had happened but for Derek to come for him, it had to be bad.

"Peter was there." Derek pulled him out of his thoughts.

"When you got me?"

"Yes. You were fighting him," Derek said in a neutral tone, just stating facts, but it was enough to stir up the guilty feeling in Stiles' stomach.

"Was he shifted?"

"Yes."

"Fuck."

Shifted meant that Stiles had fought him for real. He hadn't just tossed and turned and mumbled in his sleep.

"You took me away from a wolfed out werewolf?" That put some interesting images in his head.

"He couldn't help you," Derek said as if that was explanation enough. "He didn't like it. But he didn't fight me."

"You know, I kind of wish I was awake for that."

When Stiles returned to his cabin, stark naked and dripping wet, he did have to hurry to get ready for school before the others picked him up but he took the moment to shoot Peter a message. At least he was still talking to him and agreed to talk later. Stiles wasn't even sure how to explain what had happened last night but maybe they could pretend that it had never happened and move on.

Then Peter said that he was worried.

For a long second Stiles stared at his phone, trying to make sense out of what he was seeing. But the words didn't change the longer he looked at them. Peter had been worried. He'd just admitted that he'd been worried. Stiles was pretty sure that this was the closest to *I love you* Peter was capable of. He was not a man who talked about his feelings.

Stiles had no clue how to respond to that so he opted for an emoji with hearty eyes and left it at that.

It was their second day back and things were surprisingly normal. Yesterday all three of them had gotten glances and whispers behind their back. Today it was already old news. Stiles was still the new kid who didn't have many friends so he got glossed over easily, people were more focused on Boyd and Erica. They kept to themselves and one look at them made clear how shaken they still were. Their friends tried to talk to them but mostly they were left alone.

The only one worried about Stiles was Scott. He'd asked questions yesterday but had quickly shut up when Stiles had told him that he didn't want to talk about it. Scott had given him a considering nod and then he'd told him about his work at the local vet clinic. They had a stray puppy who was the cutest thing ever but an escape artist.

"You'll never guess where we found him yesterday." Scott had told Stiles in detail how the little dog had almost been thrown out with the trash. "He must have smelled something interesting in there. Dug his way all to the bottom. Had to wash him three times to get the stench out of his fur. He did not like that at all."

The story did have the desired effect and had lifted Stiles' mood so when they were sitting together for lunch today, he asked about the little rugrat.

"You can come over to the clinic if you like," Scott offered. "Deaton doesn't mind if I bring a friend from time to time."

Stiles doubted that Scott had ever brought a friend with him but who would say no to seeing a puppy? So Stiles agreed to come over to the clinic later that afternoon. He would have to return to the lake in between, he did not want Derek to show up at the clinic, but that shouldn't be a problem.

The problem, however, was Peter. Stiles had promised to talk to him later which had just turned into later later and he didn't know how to tell him that. He didn't want to give the impression that he was avoiding him.

It didn't help that he was supposed to have dinner with John today as well which he didn't want to cancel. John was worried about him and wanted to make sure in person that he was okay, Stiles got that.

In the end, Stiles invited Peter to join them for dinner. Of course, he checked in with John first who seemed surprised by that request but agreed easily. He and Peter had gotten along well so far and since Stiles was about to get introduced to the pack soon, Peter was talking about next weekend when Laura would be home from college, it seemed only fair that Peter got properly introduced to John.

After school, Stiles only went under for half an hour before he came up again to meet Scot at the clinic.

He wasn't sure what he'd expected but a whole bunch of dogs barking their heads off when he entered the back room, was not what he'd in mind.

"No idea what's up with them." Scott tried to calm down the dogs but they kept barking and snarling at Stiles. Only when he left the room, they slowly calmed down. Looked like Buttons was not the only dog who didn't like Stiles. He couldn't help but wonder what would happen if Peter went into that room, though. The dogs would go nuts. At least until Peter roared them into submission. Buttons was still afraid of him and avoided him at all costs.

"Sorry, they're usually not like that." Scott joined him and once he'd closed the door even the most persistent dog eased of with the barking.

"I'm just not a dog person, I guess." Stiles tried to laugh it off.

"Wait until you see Max. You'll love him. And he'll love you." Scott's face lit up. He grabbed Stiles by the sleeve and dragged him along the corridor.

"I'm not so sure about this." Stiles didn't want to be responsible for traumatizing a puppy but he did let Scott drag him into another room.

"This is Max." Scott proudly gestured at a cage in the corner. It was bigger than the ones in the other room and laid out with soft bedding. The puppy had been sleeping but he perked up when they entered the room. Wagging his tail he eagerly pressed his face between the bars and Scott didn't have to be asked twice. With cooing noises, he crouched down and scratched Max behind the ear.

"I brought a friend." Scott waved for Stiles to come closer. So far the puppy only had eyes for Scott which was probably for the better but now curiosity won and Stiles dared to step closer.

Max shied back and Stiles was about to retreat, this was a bad idea, poor puppy, but Scott had nothing of that.

"Sit down here." Scott pointed at a spot near the cage but not too close. "Let him get to know you."

"It's okay." Stiles tried to deflect him but Scott gave him a look with those puppy dog eyes and a second later Stiles found himself sitting on the cold floor. The puppy was peeking out from behind the pillow he'd retreated to. He wanted to get back to Scott for more cuddles but he didn't trust Stiles, that much was obvious.

However, it didn't take long for him to return to Scott.

It took a while but Scott seemed to have all the patience in the world and in the end, the puppy was sniffing Stiles' hand and a few minutes after that, Stiles was allowed to give him a belly rub.

"See?" Scott smiled brightly. "He likes you."

"Looks like." Stiles still couldn't believe it. "He's a stray?"

"Yep." Scott stretched out his legs and leaned his back against the cage. "Deaton thinks that somebody wanted to get rid of some puppies the easy way. He's lucky that he got found in time, most don't make it." He craned his neck to look over to Stiles who now had the puppy in his lap.

"What does your uncle think about a dog?"

"We can't adopt him." Stiles shook his head but he was not tempted anyway. John had a crazy schedule and even if Stiles had all the time in the world, when he wasn't pretending to go to school, he doubted that Max would become friends with Peter or Derek. The poor thing would be scarred for life. Stiles did tend to lose track of time when he was under. He would never forgive himself if

he forgot about the dog for days. Besides, he hadn't been lying when he'd said that he wasn't a dog person. Max was cute and all and he wouldn't mind coming by more often to play with the puppy but he was absolutely not tempted to bring him home.

"Figured." Scott nodded. "Mom's saying the same."

"You'll find a good home for him," Stiles assured him. Max's eyes were dropping and he was close to falling asleep in Stiles' lap.

"Yeah." Scott watched them for a moment longer but then he got up. "I need to go back to work."

Right, Scott wasn't here just for fun, he worked here.

"And I should go home." He let Scott pick up the sleeping dog to put him back in his cage. Max blinked a few times but went right back to sleep in his bed. "Thanks for introducing me to Max."

"Anytime." Scott made sure to close the cage properly. "Most of the time it's pretty boring here, you can come by whenever you like." He paused, lost in thoughts for a moment. "It helps."

Stiles wasn't sure what exactly he was referring to but he knew that Scott's parents were divorced and that it hadn't been pretty, that much he'd gotten out of his friend. Not that Scott had outright said any of that.

"I might do that." Stiles doubted that it would help with the nightmares but it couldn't hurt either. But then he noticed something in Scott's expression. Stiles was not the only one who'd gone through something traumatic recently. Scott had been there as well.

"It was not your fault what happened to me and the others, you know that, right?" Stiles made a wild guess but it looked like he was right.

"I should have …"

"You did the right thing," Stiles cut him off. "You called 911 and you took pictures of the van."

"I should have stopped them," Scott yelled. "I just stood there like an idiot and let them take you."

"Scott!" With both hands, Stiles forced him to look at him. "It's not your fault. It's not. I'm not blaming you and the others don't blame you either. You helped my uncle find us."

"You escaped on your own," Scott reminded him but he was listening now.

"Without your help, they wouldn't have found the van and the place where they took us," Stiles said. "That's a big step in the investigation. My uncle will get them because of that."

It took some more talking but eventually, Scott nodded, not really convinced but getting there.

"I should go back to work." Scott glanced at the clock.

"Yeah, I should get going as well." With only his short stop at the lake earlier he should go back before dinner with John and Peter. He wanted to spend as much time with Peter as possible.

"Don't forget your homework again."

Stiles rolled his eyes at him but he had a point there. He didn't care about his grades but if he didn't want to face the wrath of Harris, he better got his chemistry homework done.

Chapter 49

Peter wasn't sure what to think of the invitation to dinner. Stiles would meet Emily tomorrow and the rest of the pack this weekend when Laura would be home from college. At least that was their working plan for now, it was possible that Stiles would bolt at the last minute. He was not comfortable with the idea to just walk into a werewolf's den. Especially with the whole pack present. Stiles had agreed to have dinner with them but his heart-beat had been all over the place and he'd been reeking of anxiety. Peter had assured him that he could leave whenever he wanted and that they were all friendly but that only did that much. However, the fact alone that Stiles was willing to do this spoke of how much he wanted this. Of how much he wanted Peter.

And still. It had been Derek who Stiles had responded to last night.

Peter didn't get a chance to talk to Stiles all day and with John sitting at the table with them they wouldn't be able to talk about last night over dinner. Was that on purpose? Was Stiles stalling?

Stiles said that John would have to leave early for a night shift and that they would have time to talk later so Peter was fine with waiting until then. Maybe they could clear some things up.

Peter kept himself busy over the day but his mind kept going back to Derek's hand on Stiles' face and how Stiles had just melted into it.

Since Stiles wanted to stay as long as possible, Peter knew that he would be at John's on the dot or maybe even a bit later so he used the chance and drove over a bit early. He wanted to talk to John about the hunters and the investigation.

"Glad you didn't show up at the station for this." John led the way into the house. "Parrish would get even more suspicious."

They bypassed the living room and went upstairs.

"I have a copy of the important files here," John explained when they entered the study. "Figured you wanted to talk about that today."

"Dinner was Stiles' idea," Peter corrected. "Don't ask me what he's aiming for here." Maybe just dinner, maybe he had ulterior motives, they would see. "But yes, I wanted to talk to you. Without Stiles listening in. I don't want to make it worse for him."

John had been busy, going through the files, but now he stopped and gave Peter a look.

"How bad is it?" He asked.

Peter stepped over to the desk to have a look and for a long moment, he didn't know how to answer the question.

"He had a nightmare last night," he finally said. "A bad one."

"He gets those from time to time." John made a pained noise. "Not that often but if something hits close to home …"

Like getting knocked out, kidnapped, and tortured, Peter got that.

"Sometimes he can't wake up," John said. "He just screams and fights and can't wake up. I've seen

it twice so far." A haunted look ghosted over his face.

Peter knew exactly how he felt. What had happened last night? He didn't want to see Stiles like that ever again.

"Derek came to get him," Peter said in a low voice. He kept his eyes on the file he was leafing through but he wasn't seeing it. "He calmed him down with one touch."

The bitterness must have been audible in his voice because John said: "Don't be jealous of Derek."

"I'm not …" The idea alone was laughable.

"They have been together for a long time." It sounded like something John had told himself before. "Derek is the one thing in Stiles' life he can rely on. Derek is there for him. Always. And he will be until the end of time. Everything else is just a fleeting thing for Stiles. You. I. We will grow old and die while Stiles won't have aged a day. But Derek will be there."

Peter hadn't thought about it from that angle.

"That's why he's so obsessed with you eating healthy?"

John made a face.

"Even with rabbit food, he can't keep me alive forever."

"He loves you," Peter reminded him.

"You're important to him, too." John straightened up. "Enough with the sentimental stuff. Do you have anything new on those hunters? What about the brother? Chris Argent?"

Grateful for the change of topic, Peter brought John up to date with what his contacts had found out. Which wasn't much, the other hunters had vanished again and the Argent siblings were keeping their heads low.

John had talked to Chris but he claimed that he didn't know anything about the abducted teenagers or the men behind it.

"He says that he isn't seeing his sister that often," John said. "I got the impression that they don't get along that well."

"So you think it's more Kate's doing than Chris'?" It made sense. Peter had been observing the Argents for a while now and Chris and his wife Victoria were living quite a boring life. Chris was working on opening his business but that was all legal and not related to the supernatural at all.

"You say that Kate has been at the house," John pointed out.

"Not lately but yes, her scent was still lingering."

"That connects at least her to the crime scene," John said it in a professional tone but his heart skipped a beat over it. Officially Stiles was his nephew but in reality, they were not related at all, however, that didn't change the fact that John loved him like his own, Peter got that. It was a lot how packs worked. Boyd, Erica, and Isaac were not blood and they hadn't grown up in a pack but they were pack. Peter would kill for them, he would die for them. And he saw the same in John here.

They were still discussing the case when Peter heard the jeep in the driveway. Some barking, lots

of cursing, and a slammed door later, Stiles announced proudly: "I'm here!"

"We noticed," John yelled back and hurried to gather the papers before Stiles barged into the room.

Stiles' eyes immediately fell on the files on the table but for once he didn't seem to be interested in them. Peter ushered him out of the room nevertheless.

"I brought steak," Stiles proclaimed and with a glance at John he added: "And stuff for salad."

"As long as I get a steak with the salad," John said in a long-suffering voice. This was easy banter, it felt worn in and familiar, it reminded Peter of his pack and he couldn't hide a smile.

John was in charge of the steaks while Peter took care of the salad and Stiles was put on potato duty. Mainly his job was to wrap them in tin foil. That didn't take long and after that, he was bugging Peter to let him help.

"You're not getting a knife." Peter snagged said knife out of his reach before Stiles could get his hands on it. "I don't want a finger in my salad."

Stiles stuck out his tongue at him but then settled down to watch them prepare the food and to steal a piece of cucumber here and there.

Dinner was surprisingly fun. They kept it to a light chatter, nobody wanted to ruin the mood with the dark stuff. John and Stiles fell into an easy conversation with John telling him about what was happening at the station, the main topic being that Parrish was still looking for Derek. It got an honest laugh out of Stiles. Stiles added stories of his own, all the little things going on at school. Listening to him made it clear that he was not the teenager he looked like. He had a view on his classmates that showed how much more mature he was. But that made the usual high school shenanigans even funnier.

Peter would have been fine with just listening to them, the familiarity between them was satisfying to watch, but they included him as well. Not long and Peter was telling stories of his own. Outside of the pack, he could not talk about certain things, and who would he even talk to anyway, but here he could just tell the story of how Isaac had shredded his clothes because he had not been able to retract his claws in the beginning.

"He just stood there, in tatters and with the most miserable look on his face I've ever seen." Peter chuckled at that memory.

"I know that look," John joint in. "That one time, Stiles tried to make pancakes …"

"That was ten years ago," Stiles cut in, arms flailing. Peter had to save his glass before Stiles could knock it off the table.

"You almost burned down the house," John countered but then he turned to Peter. "You know when on TV the mad scientist screws up an experiment and it blows up in his face? That was Stiles."

"It wasn't that bad." Stiles crossed his arms over his chest, sulking, but only for a second before he pointed at John again. "And I offered to clean it up."

"It was beyond cleaning up, I had to remodel!"

There was no heat behind their argument, by now it was a fond memory. But Peter would have paid money to witness that.

After dinner John left for work, leaving the dishes to Stiles and Peter.

"I'm sorry for last night." Stiles broke the silence. The dishes were in the dishwasher and they were just cleaning up the rest. "I hope Derek didn't scare you too much." He paused before he added in a small voice: "Or I. Derek says I had a bad one."

Peter dried his hands and put away the dish towel.

"You don't have to apologize," he finally said. "After what you've been through …"

"I'm messed up, I know that." Stiles braced himself on the sink but Peter got the feeling that he was bracing himself for more than just an unpleasant conversation.

"I'm not the role model for mental health either." Peter stepped up behind him and gently put his hands on Stiles' tense shoulders. He was not good at admitting his feelings, which he had, lots of them when it came to Stiles. It almost scared him how quickly he was falling for him.

So Peter did the only thing he could think of to tell Stiles that it was okay. He tugged Stiles' collar aside and then he kissed the exposed skin of Stiles' neck.

"What are you doing?" Stiles asked, clearly amused but he did turn his head to give him better access.

Peter bit down. Hard.

Stiles sucked in a sharp breath and struggled out of reflex but Peter had his arm around his torso, holding him close, while he clamped down on Stiles' neck until he tasted blood.

After the initial second of surprise, Stiles stopped struggling and leaned more into him. He let out a moan and a wave of arousal hit Peter but this was not about that and Peter hoped that Stiles understood that.

"I take you're in for the long run?" Stiles asked when Peter finally eased off.

"I'm here for as long as you want me," Peter murmured into his ear and then he licked the blood off Stiles' skin.

"Thought werewolves don't mate for life." Stiles was still leaning into him, enjoying the soothing licks over the tender spot.

"We don't." Peter rightened Stiles' collar and straightened up. "But we do have strong bonds among pack and partners count as pack."

"Do you count me as pack?" Stiles craned his neck to look him in the eye.

Stiles most likely wouldn't like his answer, being pack was the last thing he wanted to be, but Peter didn't hesitate when he answered with a yes.

Stiles studied him for a long moment before he brought their lips together for a kiss.

They moved over to the living room eventually but they didn't watch the next Marvel movie. This was not that kind of date.

They did watch a movie, some stupid murder mystery that was so dumb it counted as a comedy. Peter fell asleep halfway through the movie.

He woke up to somebody standing in the door to the kitchen but by now he was so used to Derek showing up that he didn't wake with a start.

"No nightmares so far," Peter told him in a low voice to not wake Stiles who was sleeping, and drooling, with his head on Peter's shoulder.

Derek nodded to that and for a moment he just took in the sight of the both of them. Peter wondered what he thought of them but then Stiles was smacking his lips and with bleary eyes, he asked: "Derek?"

"Time to go home." Peter nudged him more awake and to his own surprise, he was more than okay with Stiles leaving with Derek.

Once he was alone, Peter switched off the TV, put their glasses away, and then he made sure to close the front door properly on his way out. This was not how a date was supposed to end but it was their normal now.

Chapter 50

"Are we really going to pick up Stiles?" Emily asked again, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

"Yes, we are," Peter assured her once again. Over her head, he shared an amused glance with Deborah who was trying to get her to put on her shoes and coat so that they could get going.

"I'm going to meet him before you," Emily told her mother as if she wasn't aware of that fact.

"I'm going to meet him soon. When Laura comes home," Deborah said, a smile playing on her lips. "But you have to tell me all about him later."

Emily nodded to that and for a second Peter wondered if this was a good idea. What kind of impression would the others get of Stiles from the report of a nine-year-old?

The older kids had gotten to know Stiles by now, they had picked him up for school again today, but they didn't have much to tell about him. Aside from the ride to and from school Stiles didn't hang out with them, most of the time he stuck to his friend Scott, but he still managed to keep an eye on the werewolves and on Kate as well. He gave Peter a report every day even if there wasn't much to tell. If Peter hadn't known that Kate was a hunter, he would have said that everything was normal at school.

The teenagers had accepted Stiles but like with everything else going on at school, they didn't share. Emily was different. She was a bubbling butterfly who would tell everybody willing to listen everything she knew about Stiles. And what she thought of him.

However, Stiles was waiting and Emily would just burst if she didn't see him soon, so once the kid was properly dressed with shoes and jacket, Peter grabbed her bag and ushered her out of the door.

Stiles was waiting for them where the path met the road, neither he nor Peter wanted Emily anywhere near the lake.

"Hey there," Stiles greeted them when he climbed into the car.

From the back seat, Emily was watching him with big eyes, at least for now speechless.

"You must be Emily." Stiles turned in his seat to face her. "Peter said that you're playing the guitar?"

"I'm learning," Emily clarified and Peter just waited for her to point out that they were on the way to her guitar lesson but instead she blurted out: "Do you really live in the lake? Like underwater?"

"Yes, I do." Stiles grinned at her.

"Are you a mermaid?" She leaned forward to have look at Stiles' legs. Which were just ordinary legs in tight jeans with red Converse at the end. However, Emily was part of a werewolf pack, she knew that just because somebody looked human that didn't mean that they were human.

"No, I'm not a mermaid." Stiles chuckled at that but he threw Peter a glance. "Is that what you told your pack about me?"

"Uncle Peter said that you live underwater," Emily answered for him. "That you live there with a lake monster. Does he have tentacles? Like Ursula?"

Well, that was quite an image. Peter was struggling to keep a straight face.

The way Stiles was choking on his own spit told him that Stiles' mind had gone in a different, not kid-friendly direction. Peter didn't want to know what kind of images the word *tentacles* had projected into Stiles' dirty mind but what made it even worse was the innocent look on Emily's face, eagerly waiting for details on Derek's appendixes.

"No," Stiles managed to choke out. "He doesn't have tentacles." He had to fight down the giggles at that word but he breathed through it. "He just looks like a man when he comes out of the lake."

Emily made a disappointed face.

Peter, on the other hand, filed away the piece of information Stiles had just dropped. If he looked like a man out of the lake, what did Derek look like when he was not out of the lake? He saved that question for later.

"But he can move through the pipes." Stiles tried to save the mood. "He can come out of every faucet."

"He can make himself that small?" Emily looked through the small ring she'd made with her thumb and index finger.

"He's basically water, he can go through the smallest pipes," Stiles told her which mostly answered Peter's question about Derek's form inside the lake. It did make sense.

"Are you water too?"

"No, I'm just boring old human." Stiles shook his head in clear amusement about her enthusiasm. "I just live with him."

"Because you have to stay with him." They had given Emily the cleaned-up version of what had happened to Stiles but she did know that Stiles had to stay with Derek.

"I do have to stay with him," Stiles confirmed. "But that's okay. I like Derek, he's my best friend. You have to stay with your parents, too, and that's not bad either, isn't it?"

She shook her head to that, easily accepting what he was telling her.

They arrived at their destination and Emily hurried to scramble out of the car to not be late for her lesson, Stiles forgotten for the moment.

"You're good with her," Peter said when they settled down in the waiting area. Usually, this was his time to hit the library but at the moment he did not feel comfortable with leaving Emily here alone. Maybe they could make a little detour on their way home.

"She's a curious little girl." Stiles stretched out his long legs. "And I like those open questions better than glances and whispers behind my back."

"I'll make sure to let the others now," Peter promised but his mind was on other things. What Stiles had said about Derek was still on his mind. Stiles had meant every word he'd said, Peter hadn't detected a lie.

"He is your best friend, isn't he?" When Stiles had called Derek his friend for the first time Peter hadn't believed him but back then he hadn't seen them together. Their relationship was intimate in a way that almost made him jealous.

"He is," Stiles agreed easily. "And before you ask, I don't mind staying with him, that hasn't been a lie."

"I know."

"You and your freakish werewolf senses." Stiles lowered his voice for that, they were alone in the waiting room but there were other people nearby.

"What is he?" Peter asked because that was still a mystery he hadn't been able to solve. "He's not a kelpie or a siren."

"That's the best you came up with?" Stiles huffed out a laugh. "I thought you have pages of notes, cross-references through dozens of books, and a list with your top ten guesses."

"I do have all that," Peter admitted, keeping a close eye on Stiles to catch every little reaction. "I narrowed it down to western European folklore but it feels like every little village has its own version of a water spirit. Without more information, it's impossible to tell exactly what he is." It was even possible that the myth about him had died centuries ago along with the people who had believed in it.

Stiles gave him a long look, clearly debating with himself. Peter tried to just sit there, slightly leaned back, open and relaxed, and waited for Stiles to decide if he trusted him enough.

Names held power. If Peter knew what exactly Derek was, he might be able to harm him.

"You know what's funny?" Stiles finally asked.

"Hm?" Peter gave him a curious eyebrow.

"The answer has been right in front of you the whole time." At least Stiles was enjoying this. Peter just waited for him to let him in on the joke. He didn't have to wait long. "He doesn't have a name."

"Did you name him *Derek*, then?" Peter wondered, not sure where this was heading.

"Kind of." Stiles nodded. "When I came to at the bottom of the lake, I was disoriented and freaked out. And I didn't speak German. *Derek* is me misunderstanding and mispronouncing what he introduced himself as." He paused, lost in fond memories for a moment but more for the dramatic effect, Peter guessed.

"And he introduced himself as …," Peter prompted when Stiles drew it out for too long.

"Der Nöck." Stiles grinned at him. "Get it? Der Nöck? Derek?"

Peter gave him an unimpressed look. That name, however, was familiar. It was one of about a hundred versions of that name, referring to similar water creatures all over Europe.

"I would have never been able to narrow it down to that," Peter admitted. "Thank you for telling me."

"Sure thing." Stiles was kicking his legs like a little boy, suddenly wary. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to read up on him," Peter answered truthfully, there was no point denying it. He didn't see Derek as a threat, at least not at the moment, but it wouldn't hurt to know his weak spots.

"Figured that much."

"John has wolfsbane bullets," Peter reminded him. "It's only fair if I know how to defend my pack against a possible threat."

"Fair enough."

Peter's mind was swirling with what he knew about this particular creature and he couldn't wait to get home to find out more.

On their way home, they did stop at the library, though. Neither Peter nor Stiles had been here lately and they were done with the books Peter had gotten when Emily had been sick. They needed more.

Emily and Stiles got along well so Peter left them in the children's section to have a look around himself.

"Is that Stiles with your Emily?" Denise came over to him. Peter followed her gaze to where Stiles was animatedly discussing books with the little girl. She was hanging on his lips, looked like Stiles had a new fan.

"Heard what happened the other day," Denise said with pity in her voice. "Is it true that he and two of your kids were kidnapped?"

"Yes," Peter said clipped, he didn't want to feed her more to gossip about. "They managed to escape. The sheriff is doing everything he can to find those who did it." It was the official version which wasn't that far from the truth.

"How's he holding up?"

"Stiles? He's getting there," Peter said as vaguely as possible. He was thinking of the nightmare the other night but that was nothing Denise needed to know about.

"And the sheriff? He must have been worried out of his mind." She shook her head in sympathy. "Stiles is the only family he has left. After Claudia … he wouldn't cope well if something happened to Stiles."

She had hinted at that before, that John had been looking for comfort at the bottom of a bottle after his wife had died. But that was not the man Peter knew. Peter had seen John when Stiles had been missing. He had been worried and he had feared what the ordeal would do to Stiles mentally but he had known without a doubt that Stiles would survive and that Derek would get him out rather sooner than later. John had known that he would not lose Stiles which had helped him to stay focused.

If Peter was honest, he'd been the one more worried. Boyd and Erica could have died.

Peter changed the topic by asking Denise about books on European myths and legends. He doubted that he would find here more than he had in his library at home but it couldn't hurt to check. Looked like Stiles and Emily would be busy for a while anyway.

Peter did find a few interesting books and when he came back to the children's section, he found Stiles and Emily sitting on the floor with a stack of about ten books.

"Uncle Peter, look." Emily shoved one of the books into his face. "Stiles said he'll read it to me next time."

"Setting up dates already?" Peter raised an eyebrow. "Are you cheating on me?"

"I can read children's books to you if you're into that." Stiles winked at him.

Peter didn't even bother to answer that. Instead, he picked up the pile of books and went to check them out.

On their way out to the car, Stiles and Emily were still chatting about the books, which one Stiles would read to her first and with which one she would start on her own in the meantime. Why Peter was the one carrying the books he didn't know and he had to struggle to get the car keys out of his pocket without dropping the books.

Busy with the door, he didn't pay much attention to the car coming to a halt in the spot behind him.

"We need to talk," Chris Argent said.

Chapter 51

"We need to talk," Chris Argent said while at the same time Peter said: "Emily, get in the car."

Stiles hadn't noticed the man stepping out of the car, he'd been listening to what Emily had to say about the series Peter was reading to her, but when he looked up, he recognized the hunter immediately. They had never met but Stiles had seen pictures.

Peter's command didn't leave room to argue and without questioning, Emily hurried to get in the car. She slammed the door shut and then she was watching with big eyes the standoff between her uncle and the hunter.

Stiles stepped around the car to stand next to Peter. Chris' gaze flickered over to him but it quickly settled back on the bigger threat right in front of him.

"What do we need to talk about?" Peter asked. He was looking at ease, his stand relaxed with his hands loose by his sides but Stiles knew him well enough to know that he was ready to defend them.

Chris was emitting the same false calm which made Stiles want to twitch even more. He was nobody for a stand-off like this, trying to intimidate each other.

"You sicced your attack dog on me and my wife," Chris stated.

For a second, long enough for Peter to say that he hadn't sicced anybody on them, Stiles wondered if Peter had failed to mention something important but then it dawned on him who Chris was talking about.

"Wait, did you just call Derek a dog?" Stiles almost tripped over his own feet with his outrage. "He answers to nobody and for sure not to the Hale pack."

Stiles stepped forward and jabbed a finger at Chris who finally had to acknowledge him.

"He came after you because your buddies kidnapped me. They beat me half to death, that's why he came after you. I bet he didn't even mention the Hales. He came to you with a *hands off Stiles or else*, am I right?"

Chris didn't confirm it but the way he was shifting his weight to his other foot was answer enough.

"I wasn't the one who kidnapped you."

"No," Peter spoke up. "But you're working with them. At the very least you're providing them with ammunition."

"So you're Stiles." Chris didn't rise to the bait and focused on Stiles instead. "The sheriff's nephew."

"That's me." Stiles beamed at him. This reminded him of one of his first encounters with Peter. Except that he did not like the way Chris was looking at him. Peter had been more curious than anything else, Chris was looking at him as if he was pondering if he should shoot him now or later.

"You're not, I checked." Chris crossed his arms in front of his chest. "You're not part of the pack either." At that, he jerked his chin in Peter's direction.

"What do you want?" Peter cut in.

"I don't want to be threatened in my own home." He locked eyes with Peter, pegging him for the ring leader here.

Stiles half-expected Peter to agree, he had made the same experience with Derek after all, but that would give Chris more information and Peter did not offer those willingly.

"I don't know who or what this Derek guy is but he better does not come after me or my wife again."

"But your sister is fair game?" Peter asked and when Chris just glared at him, he gave him a toothy smile. "Sorry, was it a secret that one of the teachers at the local High School is a hunter?"

"That has nothing to do with you."

"So it's coincidence that she's teaching my niece's grade?" Peter raised an eyebrow at him. "Or that hunters are swarming Beacon Hills lately? But I heard that one of your buddies had a little accident."

To that Chris took a breath, visibly restraining himself.

"I had nothing to do with that," he repeated. "Neither had my sister. We're not responsible for what those others did."

"Two things." Peter stepped closer. "You're sister's scent was still lingering in the cabin where they've taken and tortured Stiles and two of my pack. And second, as Stiles said, you brought Derek onto yourself when you took Stiles. Don't blame me or my pack for that."

Peter stepped back and reached for the driver's door.

"Stiles, get in the car, we're leaving."

Stiles didn't have to be told twice and hurried to get to the other side of the car.

"What are you, Stiles?" Chris asked before Stiles could slip into the passenger seat.

Stiles braced his arms on the roof of the car and the open door.

"Wouldn't you want to know?" He grinned at him. Chris and Peter were not that different, he'd had the exact same conversation with Peter not long ago. Like Peter, Chris was somebody who liked to gather as much information as possible.

Chris just waited for him to answer.

"Abominable snowman. But it's more of, like, a wintertime thing." Stiles made a vague gesture. "You know, seasonal."

Chris did not look impressed.

"Hey, Peter thought I was fae." Stiles' grin widened but when Peter made an impatient noise in his throat he slipped into the seat and shut the door.

Peter was already behind the wheel and the second Stiles was inside, the car started moving. Chris made no attempt to stop them, he was just watching them until Stiles lost sight of him.

"You okay, Emily?" Peter checked on the little girl in the backseat via mirror.

"I'm okay," she answered but when Stiles turned around to check on her as well, he found her looking back at him with big eyes. She might not fully understand what had just happened but enough to get scared.

"Was that a bad man?" Emily asked.

"Yes." Peter nodded. "He's one of the bad people your Aunt Talia has warned us about."

Emily's eyes grew bigger with that and she was covering her mouth with both hands.

"What was that about you being an abominable snowman?" Peter changed the topic and it took Stiles a second notice that Peter was talking to him.

"You don't look anything like a snowman," Peter continued with a side glance at him.

"That's the part bothering you?" Stiles punched him in the shoulder but he got that this was Peter trying to lighten the mood for Emily. "You're uncle thinks I'm abominable. Can you believe that?" Stiles put his full body into his words which made Emily giggle.

"Well …" Peter made a point of looking him up and down.

"You're impossible." Stiles pouted.

He would have loved to discuss their encounter with Chris but that had to wait until they were alone. So Peter just dropped him off at the lake with the promise to come by later.

"Not too soon." Stiles climbed out of the car and made extra sure that he got his bag with him. "I'm going under for a bit, I want to talk to Derek." For Emily's sake, he didn't say what he wanted to talk about. Not that it was necessary.

"Until Sunday," Stiles promised the little girl even if he still wasn't sure how he felt about meeting the whole pack.

"Are you going to read to me?" Emily asked to which Stiles agreed easily. Maybe that was a way to dodge the adults.

Before Stiles went into the lake, he shot John a message to tell him about Chris but he didn't wait for the answer. He dropped his phone on the bed, stripped down to his underwear, and then he dove into the lake.

Like always Derek welcomed him with open arms and Stiles just sank into his presence.

"Something is bothering you." Derek picked up on his mood.

"Ran into Chris Argent." Stiles let out a sigh. "Or rather, he ran into us. Ambushed us in front of the library. We had Emily with us." That was the thing that bothered Stiles the most. He got that hunters were not fond of werewolves, to them only a dead werewolf was a good werewolf, but that Chris had dragged a child into this … that was not right.

"Did he hurt you?" Derek's focus was on Stiles. Always.

"No," Stiles assured him. "He just wanted to talk, flex his muscles so to speak. You scared him pretty good, big guy."

"Was that wrong?" Derek asked. "He wasn't one of the people who took you."

"Na." Stiles waved him off. "You did good. He's involved, somehow. I think he's following his sister's lead on this."

Peter had eyes on the Argents but so far Chris and his wife hadn't done anything suspicious. But Kate had been at their house at least once and who knew where they met up to scheme their evil plans? Peter had his informants all over town but even they couldn't catch everything.

"By the way, did you go after that other hunter as well? The buddy of the guy in the basement?"

"No, I can't find him." He seemed genuinely upset about that fact. Usually, he didn't care about what was going on outside of his lake but it looked like he was willing to make an exception to scare the ones who had hurt Stiles. He might even enjoy it.

"It's only a matter of time until John or Peter can put a name to his face," Stiles assured him. Names held power. Once they had a name, there was no place in the world where that hunter could hide from Derek.

Derek grumbled to that.

Stiles would have liked to stay with him for longer, maybe even until next week so he didn't have to attend dinner with the Hales on Sunday, but Peter was probably already waiting at the cabin for him so Stiles tore himself out of Derek's presence.

Peter was indeed waiting for him at the cabin. He had dragged out a chair and was now sitting there, overlooking the lake. He had a book in his lap but he put it down the second Stiles broke the surface.

"Like what you see?" Stiles asked but wading out of the water was anything but sexy even with water running down his lean body. His boxers were saggy under best conditions but soaked like this, he had to hold on to them to not lose them in the water.

"Ursula Andress did it better."

"I'm the bond girl now?" Stiles stepped out of the lake, still clutching his boxers. "Don't get too full of yourself, James."

Stiles made sure to flick some water into Peter's face when he stomped past him. But then he stopped in his tracks.

"Should I feel old for getting that reference?"

"You were there before movies have even been invented," Peter reminded him.

"Thanks, now I really feel old."

"Sorry to break it to you but you are old, my dear."

Stiles flipped him off and went to get dressed.

"What did your pack say?"

"To you or Chris?" Peter followed him but stopped in the door frame to dramatically lean against it.

Stiles ditched the boxers and reached for a towel to dry off before he went to search for some not

too dirty clothes. It was time for another laundry day.

"Both." Stiles threw the towel over the remaining chair to dry. "But mainly what they think about me. What did Emily tell them?" For some reason, he was more worried about the little girl's opinion on him than what the adults might think of him.

"She loves you."

Stiles felt Peter's gaze on him when he bent down to put on a fresh pair of underwear which was better than facing him because Stiles was pretty sure that he was blushing.

"They want to meet you." Peter stepped closer.

Stiles felt his heart-rate pick up at that. He did not want to get reminded of Sunday so he was frantically looking for something to change the topic. His eyes fell on the book Peter had in his hand.

"What are you reading?" It did not look like some leisure reading.

Peter turned the book so that Stiles could read the title.

"Thought I'd brush up on some German folklore. I'm mainly interested in something called a Nöck." Peter gave him a toothy smile.

"What else." Stiles had expected nothing less from him. In fact, he would be worried if Peter did not openly admit that he was researching Derek. "Found a way to kill him yet?"

Chapter 52

When Peter came home with Emily, he expected the whole pack to ambush the little girl but it was only her mother, asking her if she had fun.

The rest of the pack was lingering around, though. The house was suspiciously full for this time of the day.

Emily followed her mother deeper into the house, already babbling a mile a minute. Chris Argent came up, which gained him a worried look from Deborah, but Peter shook his head, this was nothing to discuss in front of the kid.

Emily kept talking. That Stiles wasn't a mermaid and not a snowman either even if he'd said that he was. That she hadn't seen Derek but that he didn't look like Ursula, at least according to Stiles but she wasn't sure how much she trusted him on this. It got her a laugh from Deborah and Peter used the chance to slip away, he had some research to do.

He kept the door of the library ajar so that he could still hear the voices from downstairs. Mainly it was Emily's high voice but there were others as well. Too low for Peter to make out words but enough for him to know that Emily was still talking in detail about her encounter with Stiles. He probably should have stayed to intervene if or rather when she got something wrong about Stiles but he'd seen Stiles with the girl, she shouldn't have anything negative to say about him. Shouldn't.

Peter forced himself to ignore the voices and went in search for his books about European folklore. He was pretty sure that he had something specifically about German creatures somewhere but with his long research sessions lately, not every book was where it was supposed to be. Quite a lot were just randomly stacked on two tables. Peter cursed his past self for being lazy, back then he'd reasoned that he might need this or that book again but now that he needed some of the books again, he had no idea where to find them in these stacks.

While he was looking through the books, and he did not put the ones he didn't need right now back on the shelf, his mind was circling back to Chris Argent.

Derek must have spooked him pretty good. Chris had tried to shoot Derek but Peter doubted that a few bullets to the chest were enough to stop Derek. Peter got a sick satisfaction out of the thought that Chris had been almost drowned in his own home. Peter knew that feeling, it wasn't pretty.

However, the rest Chris had said was more interesting. Peter believed him that he was not one of the kidnappers but if he was just supplying the other hunters with weapons and ammunition or if he was working on another scheme against the pack, Peter did not know.

"Not in time," Peter mumbled the words that hunter had said to Stiles before Derek had drowned him. "Not in time for what?"

There was something else going on, that much was obvious but Peter had no idea what the hunters were planning. Which was unnerving.

However, he had people out there, keeping an eye on the Argents and looking for that other hunter, so when Peter found some promising books, he settled down to read up on German water spirits.

"Peter?" Talia poked her head in.

"Is it time for dinner already?" He might have gotten lost in his research for a while.

"In a minute." Talia came in and closed the door. "Emily says something about a bad man?"

"Chris Argent." Peter pushed his notes away. "Looks like Derek paid him a visit."

He relayed their encounter with the hunter to her.

"So Stiles and Derek are on his radar now." She put her thumb between her lips, thinking.

"Pretty much." Peter leaned back in his chair. "But I wouldn't worry about that too much. Derek can take care of himself and he's very protective of Stiles."

"Makes you wish he would take care of those hunters instead of just scaring them," Talia mused.

"There's no difference between them and us in his mind," Peter reminded her. "He could have taken care of me as well when I got too nosy but he chose to just make a point."

"You think those hunters will listen?" Talia was still nibbling at her thumb, clearly thinking about all the possibilities.

"We'll see. First dinner with Stiles." Which was in two days. Stiles' heart had started racing at the reminder of that.

"You say it as if it's some kind of battle." She let go of her thumb, an amused smile playing on her lips.

"To him, it is." Stiles hadn't outright said it but coming to their house, into their den, to him it was as if he was going behind enemy lines. "This is our side of the town."

Peter stayed for dinner but he left shortly after. When he slipped out of the house with a book and a container with some leftovers for Stiles under his arm, Stiles was still the topic of the table but it was all in good nature. Pamela was cooing over the fact that Stiles would read to Emily.

Stiles wasn't back up when he arrived at the cabin so Peter put the food in the fridge and dragged a chair outside. This time he wasn't waiting for a kidnapped Stiles to resurface so he got comfortable with his book.

Like he'd suspected, the name didn't help him much with Derek. It narrowed it down quite a bit but almost every country in northern Europe had its version of a Nöck. Even if he kept it to Germany alone, there were huge differences in the regional tales. And so far he'd found nothing that would prevent Derek from going wherever he wanted. Nothing on killing him either. Most versions of this creature agreed that it was better left alone. Some could be bargained with or were even willing to help for the right offer. They were not malicious per se but one better kept out of their lake or river. Despite all the differences that was something every tale about these creatures agreed on, stay away from their bodies of water.

When Stiles finally emerged from the lake, Peter put the book aside and just watched him coming out of the water. Stiles undressed and toweled off in front of him without a shred of shame but without hinting at anything sexual either. He just got dressed while he kept the easy banter going. Even when he asked if Peter had found a way to kill Derek yet, Peter knew that it was all in good nature.

"Why are you smiling?" Stiles gave him a suspicious look when his head popped out of the shirt he was now pulling down his body. His still wet hair was standing in every direction, giving him an adorable look.

"I like this," Peter answered and stepped closer to steal a kiss. They both were wary creatures, suspicious by nature, but around each other, they let their guard down without even thinking about it.

"You're weird."

"I brought food." Peter gave him another quick peck on the cheek before he went to get the leftovers. Since Stiles didn't have a microwave, he reheated it on the stove which had the double effect that the fire heated up the cabin as well.

After Stiles had his dinner, they got comfortable on the bed where they discussed the hunter situation and Derek's nature, Peter had questions and he had a better chance of getting answers from Stiles than out of old books.

Initially, they had wanted to watch a movie and were only talking to kill the time until they had settled on which one to watch but after almost three hours they didn't even pretend any longer and just sat with their backs against the wall, their legs stretched out, and with enough distance between them that Peter didn't get hit by Stiles' wild gestures while he was making his points.

Peter spent the night but he had to leave early the next morning. Somebody had spotted that other hunter. And he had to pick up Laura from the airport.

"I can come by later," Peter offered but Stiles declined. He would have dinner with John tonight and he wanted to go under for a while before that.

"Pretty sure I'm going to go under again when I come back from John and I will only come up when it's time for dinner with your folks," Stiles said with a dark shadow on his face.

"You don't have to come over." Peter reached for him and when he put his hand on Stiles' shoulder, he felt the tension under his fingers. "We're not going to force you. You know that, right?"

"It will only get worse the longer I put it off, sooner or later I'll have to meet your pack." Stiles let out a breath. "It's just … with Derek time doesn't matter. If I'm topside I will angst over this way too much. I know it's going to be fine but …" He made a helpless gesture.

"Don't worry," Peter assured him. "Want me to pick you up?"

Turned out that Stiles rather took his jeep. That way he would be able to leave whenever he wanted.

"See you tomorrow, then." They kissed goodbye and then Peter hurried to get back to his car. If he wanted to stop by the hardware store where the hunter had been sighted before he had to drive to the airport, he needed to hurry. The hunter had been there late last night and Peter had only gotten word about it this morning so there was no catching him in the act but his contact had promised him camera footage and he'd paid with a credit card so with any luck Peter would not only get a list of his purchases but a name as well.

The name on the credit card, Samuel Plant, was most likely fake but Peter took it along with the license plate the employee had jotted down for him. The video footage confirmed that it had been the man he was looking for. Peter was feeling that he was finally getting somewhere with this but when he went over the man's purchases dread settled in his guts.

Among various tools and wooden beams, the hunter had purchased quite some chemicals.

"What would one do with these?" Peter asked the employee.

"These two make good fertilizer." He pointed at them on the list. "The others are used as pesticides. I told him to be careful with those. Mixed wrong they become inflammable and can even self-ignite."

Peter did not like the sound of that. Not at all.

He left the hardware store with an uneasy feeling but now he had to pick up Laura from the airport.

"I'm gone for a few weeks and you score yourself a boyfriend?" Laura hugged him tightly.

"Hello to you too." Peter huffed but hugged her back. It always felt wrong when a pack member was away for too long. Peter closed his eyes and just took in her scent for a second but they were still in the middle of the airport with the crowd moving around them and Laura was smelling of too many people not pack. That would change over the evening but right now she just smelled wrong. Peter growled low in his throat to which she just laughed.

"You have to tell me everything."

"Who says I'm going to tell you anything?" Peter raised an eyebrow at her. One arm still around her shoulders, he grabbed her suitcase and together they walked out to where he'd parked the car.

In the solitude of the car, Laura felt comfortable enough to ask the real questions. About Stiles and Derek. For having been away for weeks she was suspiciously well informed.

Back at the house, Laura got swept away by the pack and the rest of the day she was the center of attention. Everybody wanted to reconnect with her, touching her, and making her smell like pack again. And of course, they wanted to hear everything about college. Cora was hanging on her lips but the other teenagers were more than interested as well. They wanted to hear about the people Laura had met, the parties she had been to while the adults were more interested in her studies. Especially Talia wanted to hear that college life was not all about partying.

On the other hand, Laura wanted to know about everything she'd missed over the last few weeks. Naturally, Stiles was the main topic. With him coming over for dinner tomorrow to get properly introduced into the pack, everybody was talking about him anyway. Not just because he was Peter's partner, which was still a strange concept for most of the pack, but because of his backstory as well.

Peter didn't even get a chance to talk to Talia in private but he did make extra sure that they were safe before he turned in that night.

Chapter 53

Peter sent the name and the license plate he'd gotten from the hardware store to John to run them for him. It was the only thing he could do about that hunter. After he'd left the store, the man had vanished again, none of Peter's other contacts had seen him since.

Laura being home put his mind on other things but Peter couldn't forget about the hunter for one second. Hunters playing with fire was never a good thing. They had kidnapped and tortured two of his pack before, with Stiles getting caught in the crossfire, Peter didn't want to think about what they were up to now. Did they want to burn them alive?

At least it was the weekend which meant no school and for most of the adults no work either. With Laura home and the impending dinner with Stiles, everybody stayed home anyway. However, Peter made a mental note to remind everybody of the no going out alone rule. He was thinking of Cora here but as far as he knew, she hadn't sneaked out to see her girlfriend again. But with him staying at Stiles' cabin more often than not lately, he couldn't be certain.

Looked like he had to keep his visits at the lake to a minimum. At least for a while. Peter let out a sigh. He didn't like it, but he would not put the safety of his pack in jeopardy just to get it on with Stiles.

In the morning, Peter got an answer from John. The credit card was stolen and so was the car. John had his deputies looking for the car but so far nothing. Which put Peter back to square one. He cursed under his breath but typed a *thank you* to John.

After a moment he sent another message, asking how Stiles was doing. Stiles hadn't been online since he'd said that he was heading out for dinner with John yesterday and Peter did not expect to hear from him until it was time for dinner but he was worried.

He's nervous but determined to do this, John answered. *Just don't ambush him too much*

Peter wanted to say that they wouldn't but thinking of how the pack had ambushed Emily the other day and Laura yesterday, he just wrote that he would do his best to keep the wolves at bay but that he didn't promise anything.

Stiles deserves you, John wrote. Whatever that meant.

Peter fled the house after noon when the preparations for dinner started in earnest. Pamela was the drill sergeant who put everybody to work who wasn't smart enough to get out of the house in time.

Peter had no idea what she was planning for dinner but it looked like Pamela wanted to go all out with this. He made it out when they were starting on the dough for four different pies for dessert. They didn't even have four different pies for Thanksgiving.

At first, Peter didn't go far. He wanted to make sure that nobody was in the preserve who didn't belong there but even with circling farther and farther away from the house, he didn't catch a scent he didn't know. This was private property and not open for hikers but unlike Derek's side of the town, no sheriff was keeping an eye out for trespassers here. He should talk to John about this. Maybe he could send over a patrol car a few times a day, just to make sure.

On a whim, Peter did just that. Nancy barely even looked up when he walked into the station and just waved him through.

"Peter?" John looked up from his work when Peter came in. "Did something happen?"

"Not yet but I have a bad feeling about this." He took a seat and told John about the purchase the hunter had made.

"I don't have enough people to cover both sides of the town but I think I can have them focus more on yours," John offered. "There hasn't been somebody out to the lake in quite a while. Except for you and Stiles." He gave Peter a stern look.

"I would appreciate it if I didn't get stopped by one of your deputies when I visit Stiles."

John snorted at that.

"Anyway." He sobered up a second later. "Do you have any clue what these hunters are planning?"

"Not yet." Peter shook his head. "I have the Argents under permanent observation and the whole town is looking for that other hunter. Derek couldn't find him but he spooked Chris and Kate pretty badly. I'm not even sure if they're after us, maybe Derek is their target now. Would fire be effective against him?"

"Honestly, I don't know." John leaned back in his seat. "How would they even get him somewhere where they could use fire on him? I mean he spends most of his time in the lake and he's near water if he goes somewhere else. He would be gone before they could do anything to him. If they're lucky and he doesn't kill them."

Peter nodded, deep in thoughts. He doubted that the Argents knew what Derek was and even knowing wouldn't gain them anything. Peter had been on this for weeks now and he still didn't know if it was possible to keep Derek out or to harm him.

Of course, it was possible that the hunters knew something Peter didn't know but he doubted it. What he knew about the Argents, they were primarily after werewolves anyway.

"They could use Stiles," John mused. "Maybe he should stay under for a while."

"My pack is currently preparing enough food to feed an army and Stiles has been steeling himself for this evening for days now," Peter reminded him. "I would rather not cancel. Not without anything but a bad feeling. I'll make sure that he gets home safely tonight."

They promised to keep each other updated and then Peter left. Since he was in town already, he used the rest of the afternoon to check in with some of his contacts and to drive around remote areas in hope to see that hunter or his car but no such luck.

Rather frustrated and still with that bad feeling in his guts Peter returned home late in the afternoon. He should head inside and change, Talia insisted on nice clothes, an information Peter had texted Stiles so he wouldn't be the one under-dressed, but first, he checked around the house and half a mile into the woods just to make sure that there was still nothing amiss.

When Peter finally entered the house, he tried his best to shake off the thoughts about the hunters. Stiles would be here in half an hour, that was what he should focus on.

The house was humming with too many people, the voices just a murmur with the occasional shout from Deborah for Emily to put on her shoes or from Walter who was asking where the corkscrew was. Peter still had no idea what they were having for dinner but apparently, they would have wine with it. The smell coming from the kitchen was mouthwatering, though. Peter felt his stomach grumble at that alone.

He hurried to get upstairs to freshen up and get dressed.

By the time Peter came back downstairs, his own anxiety had replaced every other worry. His pack was about to meet Stiles, his partner. The person he intended to be with for the foreseeable future. And with any luck beyond that.

About half the pack, mainly the teenagers, already knew Stiles while the adults, except for Talia, had only heard about him. If he were just a bystander Peter would have enjoyed the way the kids were watching the adults to catch their reaction while the adults were trying to appear bored while on the inside they were bursting with curiosity. Peter, however, was not a bystander, he was part of the center of attention.

It almost came as a relief when Stiles' old jeep came up the path and Peter excused himself to greet him outside.

"How many are watching us right now?" Stiles asked under his breath when he got out of the car.

"All of them." Peter didn't even bother with pinpointing heart-beats.

"Just so you know, I have to leave before nine," Stiles said still in that low voice.

"Or Derek will show up?" Peter guessed. "Smart move."

He had to give him kudos for that. Stiles must have been away from the lake for quite a while. Usually, they had until way after midnight before Derek showed up to get him.

"I'd rather not rely on him," Stiles said with a glance at the house. "And I will leave early if I have to."

"You can leave whenever you want." Peter offered his arm. "Milady."

That made Stiles laugh.

"Don't tell me you have your own Buttons."

"No evil dogs around," Peter assured him. "Just us werewolves."

"Don't know what's worse." Stiles took a breath, straightened up, and then he let Peter escort him into the house.

Talia was the one who greeted them at the door while the others kept their distance for now.

"Stiles," she said with a warm smile and this time it was honest. "Welcome."

"Thanks for having me." Stiles tried for a smile and waved awkwardly at the rest of the pack.

"Let me introduce you." With a hand on the small of Stiles' back, Peter led him deeper into the house.

Every werewolf heard Stiles' jack-rabbit heart-beat and smelled the anxiety on him. The human members saw him twitching and fiddling, his eyes darting here and there without looking directly at anybody. It was obvious how much Stiles did not want to be here.

It did two things to Peter. For one, he wanted to put himself between Stiles and his pack, which he kind of did. But on the other hand, he was proud of Stiles. He'd come here, into the den of a werewolf pack, for Peter. Stiles was here because he wanted to be with him.

"You know that bunch." Peter waved over to the teenagers who were watching the spectacle with barely concealed amusement. Isaac looked as if he wanted to have popcorn to go with this.

Peter introduced Stiles to the rest but he was pretty sure that the names were flying right over his head. But with his research on the Hale pack, Stiles most likely knew their names already.

"You're sitting next to me," Emily piped up. "If you want."

"Of course I want to." Stiles took the offer with a breath of relief. "What are we having anyway? Because I'm starving."

That was enough prompting for Emily to tell him in detail what they were having and with which dishes she'd helped.

Pamela went to check on something in the kitchen while the pack spread out in the living room. At least the room was laid out for lots of people so it didn't feel crowded.

Peter and Stiles took a couch with Emily sitting on Stiles' other side. An awkward silence settled over them and Peter was running bets in his head who would succumb first.

It was Laura.

"Sorry, I've been totally out of the loop," she spoke up. "I came home yesterday to the news that Peter is going serious with somebody. How did you two even meet?"

It was mostly a lie, Laura had been suspiciously well informed when Peter had picked her up yesterday and since then the others had filled her in on the rest but Peter was glad for her to break the ice.

"I was minding my own business when he ..." Stiles bumped his shoulder into Peter's. "Tried to dump his trash in my cabin in the middle of the night."

Stiles left out the part with the dead body, he left it at trash, but he made it a fun little story. Peter felt the tension melting out of him while he talked and by the end, Stiles even started with his wild gestures again.

By the time Pamela called them over for dinner, Stiles was not at ease, far from it, but he was not ready to bolt any second either. Peter took it as a win.

Chapter 54

Stiles was close to canceling at the last minute.

"This is ridiculous," he said to himself, already sitting in the jeep in John's driveway but for long minutes he couldn't bring himself to start the engine. Maybe he should just drive back to the lake. With a sick feeling in his stomach, Stiles did start the car and headed out to the preserve.

It was just dinner with the family of his boyfriend. Meet the family. Something millions of people went through and survived every day. It would be stiff and awkward but that was it.

Most of those million other people didn't date a werewolf, though. And they didn't have a history with the pack as Stiles did.

"I have the jeep, I can leave whenever I want," Stiles told himself. "I can pull a Cinderella at nine. It's going to be fine." He doubted that anybody would try to hold him back if he wanted to leave early but even if ... they wouldn't stand a chance against Derek.

Peter met him outside and the bastard even made him laugh with offering his arm and walking him over to the house. At least that way Stiles didn't have to face Talia alone.

Introductions were as awkward as expected and Stiles only breathed easier once he was sitting on the couch with Peter on one side and Emily on the other. They sat like that at the dinner table as well and slowly Stiles dared to relax.

The focus was on him, this whole thing was about him, but it wasn't the interrogation he'd feared. He'd kind of expected something like his meeting with Talia where she'd been borderline hostile towards him and Derek.

Stiles had no doubt that the werewolves could smell all kinds of bad emotions coming from him but they did make an effort to make this easier for him. Laura just got home from college, she had some stories to tell, and Erica could write books about customers at work.

Naturally, the conversation always circled back to Stiles. With him, however, lots of the usual topics for this occasion didn't apply. He did go to school but only as a cover, he didn't work and would most likely never pursue a career. He didn't have plans for his future because what future?

His family consisted of the sheriff and the local lake monster. The latter was something everybody at the table wanted to hear about. Only Peter and Talia had ever met Derek, Boyd and Erica's encounter with him didn't count, and the others only had the basic facts about him. Of course, they wanted to know everything first hand from Stiles.

It was the older man, Walter, who dared to touch that topic.

"We all know how you ended up living with … Derek," Walter started.

"You can call him the scary lake monster if you want to," Stiles offered with a broad grin. It got him a round of chuckles and Stiles felt himself getting more at ease around these people.

"... and I want to say how sorry we all are for what happened to you," Walter continued. Stiles made a face, he didn't want his pity but Walter glossed over it quickly. "What I wanted to ask, that scary lake monster … what is he like? As a person?"

Stiles had not expected that question so for a long second he didn't know what to say. Most didn't even see Derek as a person.

"He looks scary with those eyebrows and all that and he will drown you if you dare to go into his lake." Stiles had a stern look around, he didn't want anybody to come out there on a dare. Been there, done that. It never ended well. John would have to tell some poor parents that their kid was dead and Stiles would have to comfort Derek.

"But on the inside, he's a marshmallow." Stiles felt a smile ghosting over his lips just thinking about all the little things Derek had done to make his life as easy for him as possible.

"He's bad at Uno," Stiles added after a moment. "And he's seen more Marvel movies than Peter. But we're working on it, aren't we?" He bumped shoulders with Peter.

"He likes to go to the movies?" Erica asked. Her only encounter with Derek had been when he'd killed somebody right in front of her and then he'd almost drowned her and Boyd as well. Marvel didn't seem to fit that picture.

"Not on release day," Stiles hurried to say when he noticed Talia's expression at that. She most likely was picturing Derek in a theater packed with people. What did she expect him to do there aside from quietly soaking his seat? It was not that he was running around, randomly killing people. Mostly Derek just glared at the screen. But when Stiles was ranting about the movie afterward, he did have a thing or two to say about it. Derek would never admit it but Stiles had the suspicion that he enjoyed the experience. On occasion.

"But on my fifth or sixth re-watch?" Stiles continued as if he hadn't noticed Talia's disapproval. "I like to take somebody with me and John is not particularly interested in those movies and with his schedule …" He let out a sigh. "But now I have Peter. I'm going to get him up to date before the next one comes out."

"Shouldn't I get a say in this?" Peter raised an eyebrow at him.

"Nope."

By the time they reached the dessert part of the meal, Stiles had eaten way too much and he had an easy banter going on with Erica. There were other conversations going on and Stiles felt himself relax. He could get used to this.

"You good?" Peter asked in a low voice to which Stiles nodded. The rest of the pack was distracted by clearing the table to make room for ice cream and pies but Stiles didn't want to get caught in a lie if he gave a verbal answer.

"We made four pies," Emily told him proudly.

"I have to try all four, then." Stiles was up for the challenge. He had to call it quits after two. He was eyeing the other ones, that pecan one looked really good, but no.

"I'll make sure to add a slice of each," Pamela assured him.

"Add a slice of what to what?" Stiles tore his eyes off the pie, not following.

"The pies, silly." Pamela gave him an amused look. "I'll add them to the leftovers you're going to take home."

Stiles opened his mouth to argue but Anthony stopped him.

"Don't," he said. "You won't get out of it anyway."

Stiles was too full and comfortable to even put up a token fight so he just threw his hands up in defeat. It turned out to be a rather limp flailing.

"He likes to feed me as well." He nodded at Peter. "Must be a werewolf thing."

Stiles didn't want to move but when Emily tugged at his sleeve, he turned towards her.

"Do you want to see my room?"

"I bet he's more interested in Peter's room," Christina chimed in.

"Why would I be interested in Peter's room?" Stiles played dumb.

"You'll be more interested in the library anyway," Peter said before Christina could think of a response. "I'll show you once you've seen Emily's room. She has tidied up just for you."

"I did not," Emily protested but was already out of her chair, dragging Stiles with her.

Peter was right, Stiles was more interested in the library but he did follow the girl upstairs who was already bubbling about the games she had.

"I have Uno if Derek wants to play with us sometime," she said. "I'd even let him win."

"You would do that?" Stiles tried to picture Derek in the room he'd just entered. There was a lot of pink. And Elsa. Thinking of Derek in all this? Stiles would pay money to see that.

"You'll have to ask your parents. And Talia, I guess," Stiles added after a second. "But I can see if Derek wants to play with us sometime."

Even if he wasn't able to hear what was going on downstairs, Stiles just knew that the werewolves were all straining their ears to catch what was going on up here. He just wished he could see Talia's face at the idea of Derek playing cards with the little girl. She was probably suffering a heart attack right now.

But to be fair, the alpha had been way more friendly today than at their first encounter. She was still wary when it came to Derek but she seemed to be willing to listen. Stiles guessed that he had Peter to thank for that. He was the left hand after all, it was his job to determine if something or somebody was a threat to the pack. However, when it came to Stiles, he might be biased. Just a little bit.

On the other hand, Stiles knew without a shadow of a doubt that Peter would do everything to protect his pack.

Emily showed him the series Peter was reading to her, with the reminder that Stiles had promised to read to her as well. To not have to read to her with half the pack listening in, Stiles latched on to the first thing he spotted. Which happened to be Emily's guitar.

"You wanna try?" Emily already had it out of the case and before Stiles knew what was happening, he had a guitar in his hand.

"I don't even know how to hold this," Stiles admitted. He was holding the instrument by the neck at arm's length in fear that he would damage it.

"I'll show you."

Stiles felt sorry for the werewolves in the house when he tried to get some nice noises out of the guitar. He did manage the noises part, though.

"I'll leave that to you." Stiles carefully put the guitar on the bed. "Do you wanna play something?"

Emily suggested Uno, to practice before they would play with Derek, so a few minutes later Stiles was sitting on the floor with a full hand, wondering how many plus fours this kid had up her sleeve.

"You would be killing at poker," Stiles muttered but at least he had more than enough red cards to put in the middle. He still had seven cards when Emily proudly proclaimed Uno.

"Need some saving?" Peter poked his head in just in time to witness Emily's victory. He must have timed it.

"Please!" Stiles hurried to put the cards away before Emily could consider a rematch.

"You impressed Talia with how you are with Emily," Peter whispered into his ear when he escorted him over to the library.

"She's easy to impress, then," Stiles muttered back.

Peter opened a door and motioned for Stiles to go in first.

Stiles made it a few steps into the room before he stopped, mouth hanging open. There were a few reading nooks, two tables cluttered with what he guessed was Peter's research of Derek, but the room was dominated by the long rows of shelves filled up to the ceiling with old leather-bound books. Stiles could almost taste the knowledge stored in this room. For sure he could smell the typical mixture of dust and old paper.

"Who's easy to impress now?" Peter asked.

"I think I love you." Stiles stepped over to the closest shelf and ran a finger over the spines. "May I?"

He was known for dropping books, he knew that, but Peter gave him the go-ahead without hesitation.

Stiles couldn't even read the title of the book he'd picked, Latin was his best guess, but he browsed through the pages, marveling over the old-style printing.

"I'd rather not have any books leave the house," Peter said behind him. "But you can come over to read here whenever you like."

The book still in hand Stiles turned around to face him. Peter's face was carefully guarded, unreadable, but the offer he'd just made spoke for itself. Aside from the knowledge stored in here, the books themselves must be worth a fortune. Stiles didn't have to have a closer look to know that there were quite some first editions among them.

However, this was not about the library. Peter had just invited him into his den. Stiles didn't have to be a werewolf to understand that it was quite a big deal. And that Peter couldn't make an offer like this without the approval of his alpha.

"Thank you." Stiles closed the gap between them and brought their lips together for a kiss.

Chapter 55

As expected the evening started stiff and awkward, the pack didn't know how to act around Stiles, but over dinner, things got more relaxed. Peter gave the food credit for that, at least partly. Stiles was a stress eater or rather a stress chewer and the delicious things Pamela had put on the table did the rest. By the time they got to the dessert part, Stiles was comfortable around them and he had even an easy banter going on with Erica.

When Stiles left with Emily, silence fell over the table. Mainly so that the werewolves among them could listen in to what was going on upstairs. Peter didn't like it, it was not fair towards Stiles, but Talia's face when Emily said that she wanted to play Uno with Derek was priceless.

However, Stiles was not a guitar player and suddenly all the werewolves at the table were trying to tune out the noises coming from upstairs.

"I'm going to pack him the pie." Pamela stood which was the signal for the rest of them to clear the table.

"When is he supposed to eat all this?" Peter couldn't help but wonder when he saw the generous slices she was putting on a plate. One of each pie. And there were already containers with food for Stiles stored in the fridge.

"You said that he's mainly eating fast food," Pamela reminded him. "That boy needs something home-cooked from time to time."

"That boy is more than double your age."

"He still can't live on fast food alone."

With that Stiles had a standing invitation for dinner. Somebody just had to tell Stiles about it at some point. If Pamela had her way, Stiles would come over every day he wasn't having dinner with the sheriff but Peter wasn't sure if Stiles could handle that much interaction with the pack. Better start slow before they adopted him into the pack. But he promised to mention it to Stiles.

When Peter looked over, he found his sister standing in the door of the kitchen, watching them.

"What do you think?" He asked. She hadn't objected to Pamela's dinner plans so he was pretty sure that she approved of Stiles as well. But he wanted to hear it.

"I think that he has it as bad for you as you have it for him." She stepped over to put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm happy that you found somebody like him. And of course, you have to pick the only one in town who's even more fucked up than you." This was not his alpha, this was his big sister talking.

"It would be boring otherwise." He gave her a toothy smile. Then he went to see what Stiles and Emily were up to. It was suspiciously quiet upstairs.

Looked like Stiles was losing at Uno. For a moment Peter just stood in the hallway, listening in to them, but he entered when it became clear that the game was over.

He managed to get Stiles away before he could get roped into another round. Peter knew that Stiles' time was limited and he wanted to show him the library before he had to leave.

"I think I love you," Stiles blurted out at the sight of his book collection.

Peter watched Stiles marveling over one of the books, his words still echoing in his mind. He knew that Stiles hadn't been serious, it was just the books, but those words struck a chord with Peter. He was just glad that Stiles was busy with the book and didn't notice the silly smile on Peter's face.

It had been a long time since somebody had said those words to him. He was pretty sure it had been Olivia even if he couldn't recall when she'd said *I love yo*u to him last. He remembered the first time, though. It had been a throwaway line over something stupid, pretty much like Stiles' just now, but Peter had been able to sense the truth behind those words. Back then he hadn't been sure if he could trust that feeling but it had turned out that Olivia had truly meant those words. He had the same feeling now.

By the time Stiles was done with the book, Peter had his emotions under control again.

Some of these books were rare, some even one of a kind, and it had taken Peter and others before him decades to build up this collection so it was only reasonable that he didn't want for any of them to leave this room. But his offer that Stiles could come by to read whenever he wanted to was genuine. He'd seen Stiles dropping books before but the way he was handling the one he had in hand, told Peter that he would be more careful with these than with some mainstream novel he'd picked up at the public library.

Peter wanted to add the thing about dinner but Stiles stepped closer and then they were kissing.

It was getting late, it had to be around half past eight by now, and neither of them wanted for Derek to show up, not yet, not today, so Stiles put that one book back and after a last wistful look at the long shelves, he headed towards the door.

"I'll be back," Stiles said in a bad Schwarzenegger imitation, making Peter laugh.

"The offer stands." Peter caught up with him. "And Pamela wants to have you over for dinner as often as possible."

That stopped Stiles dead in his tracks.

"Thanks but …," Stiles started but didn't seem to know how to finish the sentence. A spike of anxiety hit Peter's nose.

"It doesn't have to be tomorrow," Peter hurried to say. "Or ever. It's just … the offer stands," he repeated his own words. "If you come by to read you could as well stay for dinner."

Worrying his lip, Stiles was pondering the idea.

"I'll think about it." Stiles stepped out into the hallway. "But now I really have to leave."

"Just for future reference, it would be okay if Derek showed up here." Peter followed him down the stairs where people scurried away to pretend that they had not been eavesdropping on them.

Isaac and Erica didn't even bother, they remained where they were and openly watched them coming down the stairs. Cora was lingering close by as well but she was more subtle about it.

"No privacy in a house full of werewolves," Stiles muttered under his breath but loud enough for all the werewolves around to hear. "Remind me to not have sex with you under this roof."

"Don't know." Peter sauntered down the last steps. "Boyd and Erica don't seem to mind if

everybody in the house can hear what they're doing."

Erica just shrugged, not in the slightest ashamed.

"The other couples don't seem to mind either." Peter raised his voice a little to address the rest of the pack hiding in the living room. "And if I recall correctly, you don't have a problem with Derek showing up while we're still at it."

"That's totally different." Stiles threw his hands up.

"You wanted to ask Derek to wait until we were finished," Peter reminded him. He doubted that Stiles had been serious but it had come up.

"That's way too much information." Cora hurried away in disgust.

Isaac and Erica, however, were eyeing Stiles with interest. Peter did not want to know what was going on in their heads. Erica was the most open-minded when it came to sex and she truly didn't care if somebody heard what she and Boyd were doing and Isaac was just an asshole by nature.

Before they had time to word the questions clearly wanting to burst out of them, Peter shooed them away.

"Stiles was about to leave."

A few minutes later Stiles did leave with his jeep packed with more food than one person could eat. Peter had to promise to come over tomorrow to help with that.

"So, that was Stiles," Peter said when he joined the pack gathered in the living room. Suddenly he felt tired.

Emily scooted over and offered him a seat which he took with a grateful smile.

"I like him," she assured him and snuggled closer. It was past her bedtime but after this evening Peter doubted that she would be able to sleep any time soon.

"He's not what I expected," Anthony spoke up and with that, they were discussing Stiles again. What they had been expecting and how he'd turned out to be. That he'd been scared shitless at first, not that they used that word in front of Emily, and that they were glad that he'd somewhat warmed up to them.

The teenagers threw in what they knew about Stiles from school and then Boyd and Erica were back at when they had been kidnapped and how Stiles and Derek had saved them.

And then it started all over again.

Peter couldn't stand it. He knew that they all liked Stiles, they were pointing out the good things they had noticed about him and didn't mention the bad things, if there were any, but Peter could not just sit here and listen to them.

"I think it's time for bed for you." Peter bumped shoulders with Emily who had been leaning more heavily into him over the last few minutes. "Want me to read to you again?"

She nodded to that so he sent her off to get ready for bed.

Peter followed her a few minutes later. Just when Michael brought up the deal their ancestor had with Derek and how badly Stiles had gotten screwed over with that. Next, they would be

discussing how sad it was that Stiles was bound to Derek like that and if they couldn't do something about it.

Peter fled the room before they could ask him about options there. He didn't know if there was a way to free Stiles. He didn't know what Derek would do if they tried something like that. He wasn't sure if he wanted to find out.

Plus, Stiles didn't want their help. After getting to know Stiles and seeing him with Derek, Peter understood that it hadn't just been something Stiles had said to get him off his ass. Stiles was more than okay with his life.

When Peter came upstairs, he found Emily ready for bed and sorting through the books she'd picked out with Stiles the other day.

"Stiles promised to read me this one." She put one aside but gathered two others. "You can read me one of these."

"How generous of you." Peter took the books to check the backs to see which one would be less cringe-worthy to read while Emily scrambled under the covers.

Peter picked the one thick enough to last them at least for two more good night stories. It was about a girl solving crime with her cat, he could get behind that.

"Comfy?" Peter made sure to tuck her in properly before he set down on the edge of the bed and started reading.

Like predicted Emily was not ready for sleep just yet, her mind swirling with the events of the evening.

"Is Stiles going to come over for dinner again?" She interrupted his reading before he'd even finished the first page.

"Today was a bit much for him," Peter said carefully. By now Stiles was most likely under again and he didn't expect him to come up any time soon. "But yes, I think he's going to come over again."

Maybe not for dinner, not right away, but Peter had a hunch that Stiles would be back rather sooner than later to visit the library.

"Is Derek going to come as well?" Emily asked. "Doesn't he want to have dinner as well? He can't cook in the lake."

"Stiles has a stove in his cabin." Peter doubted that Stiles had ever cooked for Derek. Or even for himself. "But I don't think that Derek cares much for dinner. I'm not even sure if he needs to eat."

He'd seen Derek eating but that could have just been to blend in.

"Everybody needs to eat," Emily said as if he was silly.

Peter opened his mouth to defend himself when all hell broke loose.

Somewhere in the house glass shattered followed by explosions. People were screaming.

"Stay here!" Peter was already at the door when something smashed the window. Grenade, Peter registered before instinct took over.

He jumped across the room, landed on the bed, and rolled with Emily to protect her with his body. The grenade exploded and liquid fire rained down on Peter.

Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

If you are worried about Emily, please read the note at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stiles left the Hale house with too many mixed feelings. He glanced at the containers of food now sitting on the seat next to him.

Peter's words still echoed in his mind. That he could come over to read whenever he wanted to. That he could stay for dinner. It was an invitation into the pack. Stiles didn't know how to handle that.

He didn't even make it out of the preserve before he had to stop the car. He was driving too erratic, all the tension breaking free now, and he would end up in a ditch if he didn't stop to collect himself.

His thoughts were running in circles and Stiles forced himself to take a deep breath. He'd survived the evening. He just needed a moment to let it sink in. He let his head fall back and closed his eyes, just for a minute.

"I think I'm going to try that pecan pie now," Stiles proclaimed but didn't move or even opened his eyes for almost another minute. He probably should just drive back to his cabin and eat the pie there with a fork and everything but now the idea was in his head and he couldn't wait.

Peter had once said that he was not just a stress eater, he was a relief eater as well. And he was having quite a lot of relief right now, okay?

Stiles found the pie and took a healthy bite. He was still more than full from earlier but he just needed something sweet to chew on. With a sigh, he closed his eyes and just enjoyed the rich flavor.

"Damn, this is good," Stiles muttered to himself and took another bite. He didn't intend to demolish the whole slice here in the car, the pie deserved more appreciation than that, but one more bite couldn't hurt.

Feeling better, he wrapped up the rest of the pie for later, licked his fingers, and reached for the key in the ignition. If he wanted to make it home before Derek popped out of whatever body of water was nearby he better hurried.

"Too late." Stiles caught sight of a figure walking between the trees. A second later it became clear that it was not Derek. He would come straight for Stiles, this person was moving past him. His second thought was that this was one of the Hales but then he caught a glimpse of the face.

Kate Argent.

"What are you doing out here?" Stiles wondered and ducked deeper into his car. She didn't seem to have noticed the car, she was making her way through the woods at quite a distance from the road. Stiles wondered if he should follow her, just to see what she was up to. Or had been up to. Judging

by where she was heading, she was coming from the Hale house.

Stiles turned in his seat, not sure where to go but then he noticed the orange color above the trees.

"What the fuck?"

The engine roared to life and Stiles turned the car around.

The house was on fire. Flames were licking through open windows and black smoke hung heavily over the clearing. But there were no people outside. The front door was closed but through the windows, Stiles saw movement.

Stiles didn't wait for the jeep to fully stop before he jumped out. Now he did hear the screams. The pack was trapped inside.

"Hey!" He screamed but his voice got lost in the roaring of the fire. He had to shield his face with his arm to get even close enough to see what was blocking the door. And why the pack didn't just escape through the windows, most were broken anyway, he didn't know.

The door was blocked with some wooden beams. They didn't look sturdy enough to stand a chance against a werewolf, for sure not against a panicked werewolf fighting for his life, but they were holding. The whole door was vibrating with every thump of werewolves trying to break through but it was holding. Against werewolves.

"Stay back!" Stiles yelled in hope that the wolves inside would hear him. "I'm going to ram it in."

With that, he sprinted back to his jeep.

He floored it and braced himself for the impact.

He took out half the frame with the door and cracked his head on the windshield but the door was now open. Smoke filled the air, making it hard to breathe, and when Stiles stumbled out of the jeep, the heat hit him like a brick wall.

"Get out!" He yelled and grabbed the person closest to him by the arm. The fresh air coming through the broken door fueled the flames. They were closing in in them. Fast.

Dragging whoever he'd grabbed, Stiles headed towards the door. The person was helping but Stiles still had to do most of the work. But people were climbing over the jeep now. Most were able to get out themselves, others were dragged like the one Stiles was helping out.

"Is everybody here?" Talia's voice carried over the growing group of coughing and spitting people. Out in the fresh air, the person Stiles had been dragging with him came to life as well. One of the women, Christina or Deborah, he wasn't sure and didn't care. His vision was blurry. Smoke and soot were burning in his eyes and when Stiles wiped his forehead with the back of his hand it came back sticky with blood. That explained the dizziness.

"Emily?" The woman came up to a wobbly stand. "Emily!"

Frantically she was looking around.

"Where's Peter?" Talia asked from the other side.

"They were upstairs, both of them." Stiles heard somebody say and a second later he sprinted back into the burning house. There were voices behind him, trying to hold him back but he ignored

them. There were still people in there. Peter was in there.

The heat almost knocked him out and the smoke was clogging his lungs making him cough but he stayed low and made his way to where he thought the stairs were.

It felt like an eternity and by now Stiles was sure that he'd missed the stairs but then he stumbled over them. On all fours, he crawled upstairs.

Where was Emily's room? He couldn't remember which way to go. There were too many rooms up here. Stiles stumbled forward, squinting against the heat but with the smoke burning in his eyes and flames all around him he couldn't see a damn thing.

He stepped on something and fell to his knees, burning his hands on the smoldering floor.

"Peter?" The lump on the ground had the right size for a man. "Peter, c'mon. Get up."

It was not just Peter, Stiles realized when he tried to move him. Under him was a smaller body. Emily.

"Peter!" Stiles yelled but it only came out a croak.

There was no way he could carry out both of them.

Emily was lighter and Peter's chance to survive just that little bit longer was way higher with him being a werewolf but it was still a hard decision to make.

"I'll be back," Stiles tried to say when he picked up Emily under the armpits. Dragging her seemed to be the best option, staying as low as possible. Stiles just hoped that he was moving in the right direction, he couldn't see anything besides smoke and flames.

Suddenly a wet hand landed on his shoulder.

"Stiles," Derek said behind him.

"Get Peter, we have to get out of here," Stiles yelled and changed direction. They only had to get to the bathroom now. They were getting out of here.

Stiles got a face full of hot steam when Derek stepped past him to get Peter but he just ducked his head and tightened his grip on Emily.

For a second Stiles wondered if Derek would just vaporize, he was a walking steam cloud but he didn't have time to worry about that. Derek dragged Peter by the collar as if didn't weigh anything and when he passed Stiles, he grabbed him the same way. Stiles just had to hold on to Emily. He buried his face in her neck to avoid the heat and the smoke as best as he could. Just a moment longer. They would be back at the lake in a second.

The cold water came as a shock. One second Stiles felt his skin blistering and then cold water knocked out what little air he had in his lungs. It was tempting to just sink to the bottom of the lake, let the water soothe his burned skin, fall into Derek's embrace until he was healed up but he still had Emily in his arms.

Stiles kicked upward and broke the surface. Making sure that Emily's face was out of the water, he swam towards the shore.

Derek came up as well. With Peter in his arms.

"Derek," Stiles whispered. "No."

For now, Derek had his hand under Peter's head, holding him above the water, but the way Derek was looking at him …

"Derek!" Stiles tried to get his attention. "Look at me. You're not going to do that. You're not!"

Slowly Derek looked up to meet his eyes. There was misty blue burning in Derek's.

"Get her out of the water," Derek said in a dangerously low voice.

Stiles started to swim. He didn't know if Emily was even alive but he didn't save her to let her drown now. But he kept talking. If he could stall Derek long enough …

Just until he'd brought Emily to safety.

"Derek, I like him," Stiles spluttered between strong strokes. Almost there. "I think I love him. Don't take him away, please, don't."

Derek had killed that hunter not long ago, without that he wouldn't be able to resist as long as he was now, Stiles knew that. But eventually, Derek would give in to his nature.

When Derek started to move, Stiles was certain that he would drag Peter under but instead, he brought him closer to the shore. Still supporting his head with one hand.

"Hurry," Derek said, his voice pressed with how much he was restraining himself. Stiles didn't have to be told twice.

He reached the shore and dragged Emily on dry land before he dove back in.

"Give him to me." Stiles tried to pry Peter out of Derek's arms but Derek didn't let go. If anything he was hugging him even closer to his chest.

"Derek." Stiles tugged harder. "You can't have him. He's mine."

Stiles didn't stand a chance against Derek, he knew that, not if Derek wanted to take Peter.

"Derek, please."

Suddenly Derek let go and Stiles stumbled backward with Peter landing on top of him. Stiles didn't wait for Derek to change his mind. The second he broke the surface again, he swam back to the shore as fast as he could.

It was harder to drag Peter onto dry land but Stiles only dared to let go of him when his feet were out of the water.

Peter looked bad. His left side was a black mess, still radiating heat. His clothes were melted into the skin and half his face was gone as well. But he was breathing. That was enough for Stiles. His freakish werewolf healing would take care of the rest.

"Don't you dare and die on me now," Stiles muttered but turned to Emily.

She was not breathing.

"Shit."

At least he found a heart-beat. Sluggish but there.

Stiles tipped her head back, checked that the airways were free, and then he gave her the first breath. Her chest rose with the air but she was not taking the next breath on her own. Stiles breathed into her mouth two more times before he dared to take the second to take his phone out.

"Dammit." Stiles cried in frustration when it didn't turn on. It was dripping wet. "Derek, we need an ambulance here. Get John. And we might need Talia as well. Hurry!"

Derek had been watching him from where he was still standing up to his hips in the water but when Stiles looked up after giving Emily the next breath, he was gone.

Chapter End Notes

> Stiles gets Emily out of the burning house. She stops breathing and he has to give her mouth to mouth. But I promise she's going to be fine.

Chapter 57

Stiles didn't know for how long he'd been giving Emily the breath of life, with glances at where Peter was still lying unconscious on the ground in between, but he kept going. At least she had a heart-beat.

"C'mon, you can do this on your own," Stiles muttered between breaths.

As if she'd heard him, Emily sucked in a shallow breath which ended in weak coughing.

"There you go." Stiles rolled her to the side, he didn't want her to choke, but he kept a hand on her ribcage to monitor her breathing. Once he was sure that she was breathing on her own, he dared to leave her side for a second to check on Peter.

He was breathing, shallowly but steadily. Kind of. There were pauses longer than Stiles liked but he was telling himself that if Peter had survived this far, he would make it. It wasn't visible yet but Stiles was sure that his body was already healing.

"What the hell happened to you?" Stiles wondered. He wasn't an expert but this didn't look like Peter had just been too close to the flames. This looked as if somebody had poured napalm over him.

In the fading light Stiles couldn't make out details for which he was grateful but what he could see plus the smell of burned flesh was enough to make him gag.

There was nothing he could do for Peter so Stiles focused on Emily for now. She was unconscious but she was breathing.

She had a few burns but under the grime her face was pale. Stiles was not a doctor but he figured that that wasn't a good sign. How long had she been unconscious anyway?

"Emily?" He tried to rouse her. He brushed the hair out of her face to which her eyelids started to flutter. "Hey, sweety. Open your eyes."

She blinked her eyes open but it was unfocused at best and her eyelids started to drop just a second later.

"None of that." Stiles cupped her face to force her to look at him. "You can't sleep just yet. You hear me?"

Her eyes settled on him.

"There you go." He tried for a smile. "Just stay awake, help is coming." At least he hoped that help was coming. Why wasn't Derek back yet?

With the immediate danger gone, Stiles fell to his ass next to Emily. He just needed to sit for a moment.

His brain hadn't caught up with his own injuries just yet but when he looked at his raw and blistered hands he winced in pain. His face felt weird as well, too tight and as if his skin might rip if he dared to move the slightest muscle.

There was a rattling in his lungs and when he tried to breathe past it, he started to cough. It became

a coughing fit rather quickly and then Stiles was clawing at the grass in his panic when he couldn't catch a breath. Dark spots were dancing in his vision and he couldn't breathe. It was not like drowning but it still felt like dying.

"Stiles."

A cold hand cupped his face. Through watering eyes, Stiles couldn't see him but he threw himself at Derek who started to rub a wet hand up and down his back.

"Did you find John?" Stiles asked when he was able to bring out words again. There was still a tickling in the back of his throat and he didn't dare to inhale too deeply to not cause a new coughing fit.

"I found him," Derek answered and didn't point out that it was his easiest trick. "He called an ambulance. He's coming here with Talia."

"You didn't bring them?" Stiles peeled himself away from Derek enough to peer out over the lake.

"That would be a bad idea," Derek said.

"Yeah." Stiles made and buried his face in Derek's chest again. The wet fabric of his shirt felt nice against his burned skin. "Thank you for not drowning Peter. Really appreciate that."

"I didn't want to drown him," Derek said in a low voice. "But …"

"I know." Blindly Stiles patted his shoulder. "I wouldn't have blamed you. But I'm happy you didn't."

It had been a close call, for a second Stiles had been sure that Derek would drag Peter under. Especially after Derek had literally gone through fire, he'd been a walking steam cloud in the house. The urge must have been strong.

"How are you?" Stiles asked. "Did you get hurt in the fire?"

"I'm fine," Derek assured him. "We should go back, you're hurt."

"You need to recover as well." Stiles read him like an open book. Derek wasn't injured like the rest of them but the fire had harmed him. He did need to go under just as much as Stiles did.

Stiles would love to just let Derek carry him out into the lake, he was exhausted and slowly his body started to remind him of all the places he'd gotten burned or scratched. There was a major headache building up at the base of his skull, he most likely had a concussion, and he just wanted to forget about all this but Peter hadn't gained consciousness yet and Emily was not all there either.

"I can't leave them." Stiles turned to check on Emily. "I'll come under once John is here."

Stiles fully expected Derek to walk out into the lake now but to his surprise, Derek stayed. While Stiles turned to Emily, Derek watched over Peter.

"Stiles?" Emily asked, her voice choked with tears. "Where's Mommy?"

Weakly she was reaching for him.

"Hey, it's okay." Stiles scooted closer. "You're at the lake. Derek saved us." Glancing over to where Peter was lying he made sure to block her line of sight. There were things she didn't need to see. Hell, Stiles didn't need to see this. He felt like throwing up just looking at the charred mess

that was the left side of Peter's face.

"They're coming," Derek said and sure enough, a second later Stiles heard the sirens.

"Fucking finally."

Talia was the first to come running up to them followed by John.

"Emily? Peter?" Talia was by their side in a heart-beat and Stiles hurried to get out of the way.

"Stiles, you okay?" John was more worried about him but Stiles waved him off. He was fine. Or rather he would be fine as soon as he went under. But first, they had to take care of Peter and Emily.

Stiles let John guide him to sit somewhere at the side to not be in the way.

"She wasn't breathing." The gravity of that fact only slowly sank in. "Had to give her mouth to mouth."

"The paramedics are right behind us, they will take care of her. You did good," John assured him. "What the hell happened at the house? When we arrived we found your car stuck in the door and Talia told me that you ran back in to get Peter and Emily but neither of you came back out. We thought you were all dead."

"I can hardly die." Stiles managed a lopsided grin but his lips cracked with the strain and he tasted blood.

"You were never stuck in a burning house before." John grabbed him by the shoulder as if he had to make sure that Stiles was really there. "Talia said that they sealed the house with mountain ash and mistletoe and that there was wolfsbane in the fire, the werewolves couldn't go back in. I didn't know what it would do to you."

"I'm here." Stiles leaned into him. "Derek got us out."

Once Emily was on a stretcher and on her way to the ambulance, one of the paramedics came over to check on Stiles as well but John shooed him away. The man was not happy with that, he was talking about smoke poisoning and infection and John had to promise to bring Stiles to the hospital himself to get him to leave them alone.

Parrish was there as well and for some reason, he was trying to arrest Derek. The sight was so surreal that for a long moment Stiles was convinced that he was hallucinating, maybe that guy had been right with the smoke poisoning. But no matter how often he blinked to clear his vision, there was Parrish who was trying to convince Derek to uncross his arms so that he could put him in cuffs. Derek just glared at him from under thick eyebrows and kept his arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Crap." John had followed his line of sight. "You okay for the moment?"

"I'll be fine once I can go under and I kind of need Derek for that." Stiles waved him off to save Derek from Parrish.

Stiles didn't know what Derek had done this time and they were too far away to catch what they were saying, not that Stiles was particularly good at focusing right now, but John and Parrish were building up to a heated argument while Derek just stood there.

"He was at the house," Parrish yelled loud enough for Stiles to hear. "He has some explaining to do."

The last thing Stiles wanted was for Parrish to take Derek in. Not that he could keep him for long but Stiles didn't want to wait that long. He wanted to go under.

To distract himself, he looked over to where the paramedics were still working on Peter. Emily was already on her way to the hospital but Peter's case seemed to be more difficult. From this angle, Stiles couldn't see anything but his eyes were still watering so his vision was blurry at best anyway. He'd seen Peter earlier, he didn't want to see more of that. He would wait until he was all healed up. Distantly he wondered how Talia intended to explain Peter's quick recovery but that was not his problem.

"Stiles?"

Without him noticing Parrish had come over to him.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Parrish crouched down next to him.

"Weren't you just arresting Derek?" Stiles wondered. Had he missed something?

"That's his name? Derek?" Parrish picked up on that. Of course, he did. Stiles sighed but didn't care about his slip.

"Your uncle is dealing with him," Parrish added when Stiles failed to answer. "Who is he? What was he doing at the house earlier?"

"At the house?" Stiles was not following. Nobody had seen Derek at the house. What the fuck was he talking about? But then it dawned on him that the deputy must be talking about the time Derek had gone to find John. It made sense. And even if not, Stiles' head was hurting too much to worry about little details like that.

Lost in thoughts he forgot about Parrish for a moment but the deputy was still at his side, waiting for answers.

"How did you even get out here?" Parrish asked. "The Hale house is on the other side of the town."

Stiles barked out a laugh at the wording which propelled him right into the next coughing fit.

"You should get checked out." Parrish awkwardly patted his back in an attempt to help with the coughing. Stiles would have told him how much that was not helping but he was too busy coughing his lungs out.

"John is taking me in a bit." Stiles tried to get him off his back. Literally. "Can we do this tomorrow?" Stiles didn't even have to play it up, he felt like shit and he knew that he looked the part.

Parrish didn't like it, he had questions and he knew that Stiles could give him some answers, but in the end, he backed off.

"Parrish, go back to the Hale house, see what you can do there." John sent him off and reluctantly Parrish followed the paramedics who were wheeling Peter to the second ambulance.

"He's going to be back," Stiles said darkly. "What's his deal with Derek anyway?"

"Derek is a suspect." John shrugged but before he could say more, Talia came over to them.

"I'm going with Peter."

"How bad is it?" Stiles asked. As far as he could tell, Peter was still unconscious. Shouldn't he be awake by now?

"He's alive." She ran a hand through her hair but dropped when her fingers got caught in grimy knots. Her body had healed but her clothes were burned and she was coated in smut and ash. "But there was wolfsbane mixed in whatever they used. It burned into his body, poisoning him." She covered her mouth with her hand, blinking against the tears.

"He's not going to die, is he?" Stiles stumbled to his feet, ready to come with her, but white pain exploded behind his eyes with the sudden movement. It felt like his head was cracking open which might even be the case. He had hit his head on the windshield pretty hard earlier.

Derek caught him before he face-planted. He was not going anywhere today. Derek probably had to carry him into the lake.

"I don't know," Talia answered, her voice cracking.

Chapter 58

Stiles went under. Or better, Derek carried his half-conscious ass into the lake where Stiles sank to the bottom like a rock. When the water made the first contact with his skin, he hissed in pain but that only lasted for a second and then he just fell into Derek's soothing arms.

Here nothing hurt. Here Stiles didn't have to think. A part of him was worried about Peter, he hadn't looked good and Talia hadn't been able to ease Stiles' worries but that too only lasted for a moment before it got swept away by the water.

When Stiles came up again, it was dark. He doubted that he'd lost much time but he couldn't tell if this was the next day or the one after that. Maybe it was Wednesday already.

He was still wearing the clothes he'd run into a burning building with. They were burned and ripped and reeking of smoke. On top of that, they were soaking wet which had turned the ash and smut into black goo.

Stiles stripped and piled his clothes next to the door, they were not salvageable. Then he went back into the lake to wash off the worst of the grime but his first stop today would be at John's for a long shower. Which wouldn't be that easy to do, Stiles realized.

His phone was dead and his jeep was most likely still stuck in the front door of the Hale house.

"Great, just fucking great," Stiles muttered to himself.

At least he had his laptop so he could check the date. Just past ten on Monday evening. He'd spent roughly twenty-four hours under. Not as bad as he'd feared. He would have stayed under for longer to heal up but he wanted to know how Peter was doing. He should be back to his old self by now but the wolfsbane poisoning might have slowed down the healing. Stiles didn't know how that would affect a werewolf's ability to heal but Talia had been worried which made him worried.

Since he had the laptop running, Stiles checked his emails. Without his phone that was the only way to contact him out here.

John had sent him an email this morning.

The house had mostly burned down but nobody had died. The human members of the pack had all been checked out and they had kept Christina overnight to make sure that the baby was alright. The others had minor injuries but they had been free to leave the hospital. They stayed with pack members living in town for now. John had deputies checking on them regularly.

Emily was still in the ICU but according to John, she was doing fine.

The one not doing fine was Peter.

He'd been in surgery all night where they had removed burned skin and flesh and whatever other stuff had melted into his wounds. John didn't go into detail here but Stiles was researching third-degree burns while he was reading the email. Most pictures weren't as bad as what he'd seen on Peter. Half of Peter's face had been gone and at least his left arm and his flank had been severely burned as well. If he weren't a werewolf, he would have died.

John's email was from the morning, almost twelve hours old, so Stiles hoped that it was old news by now. With this much time, Peter should be better.

John ended his report with a reminder that they would need his statement and that Parrish was eager to talk to him. About the fire and Derek. Apparently, Derek was still a suspect.

"What's his deal with Derek anyway?" Stiles shook his head.

He typed a quick answer, that he was topside now and would love a ride into town. He still wanted that shower and he wanted to know what had happened over the day. John had not mentioned the investigation. Did they have any suspects? Aside from Derek?

Stiles had seen Kate Argent fleeing the scene but he couldn't remember if he'd mentioned that to John. He doubted it. He'd been out of it yesterday and there had been more important things on his mind. So he added that information as well and sent the email out. Now he could only hope that John would read his mail soon.

While he waited for John to answer, Stiles browsed the internet for information on what had happened last night. The fire had been on the news and the pictures alone made him sick in the stomach. Stiles was reading a newspaper article while simultaneously watching a report from last night with the reporter in front of the on fire house. His car was still stuck in the door.

The reporter was saying something about that and that the same person had run back into the house to save two missing people.

"This brave act of heroism might have turned out to be a fatal mistake," the reporter said with a glance over his shoulder as if he expected for Stiles to emerge from the flames right on cue. Which of course didn't happen.

The man kept talking but Stiles tuned him out when he started to speculate about the reason behind the attack. The door had been blocked from the outside so it was obvious that this wasn't an accident but Stiles doubted that the reporter would come even close to the truth.

The article mentioned Stiles as well, not by name though, and it was more optimistic that he'd made it out alive because they also covered Peter and Emily. Not by name either and it only said that survivors had been found quite a distance from the house, which was an understatement, but it ended rather optimistic with the fact that the survivors were severely injured but stable.

Before Stiles could dive into this for real, there were already wild theories about the reasons behind this on the internet, he got an answer from John that he was on his way to pick him up.

"How's Peter?" Was Stiles' first question when he hopped into the sheriff's cruiser. "Did you make any arrests yet? Did I mention that I saw Kate Argent fleeing the scene? You should talk to her. What about Emily?"

"Hello to you too," John said, clearly amused. However, when he glanced over to Stiles, it was with worry in his eyes.

"You came up sooner than I expected," John said. "You okay?"

"I'm fine," Stiles answered out of reflex but then he added: "Not quite back to one hundred percent and I can't stay for too long but I didn't want to miss too much. I'm worried about Peter."

"He's still in the hospital," John gave him an update. "They put him in one of those sterile rooms for burn victims. He's in a coma."

"What?" He must have heard that wrong. "He's a werewolf. How can a werewolf be in a coma?"

"The severe damage to his body combined with the wolfsbane poisoning. That stuff has burned its way down to the bone." John had the steering wheel in a white-knuckled grip and Stiles could see his jaw working. "It's just too much. His healing abilities are keeping him alive but the actual healing is minimal at best. At least that's Talia's explanation."

"You talked to her?"

"She hasn't left the hospital since yesterday but they won't let her see Peter," John continued. "I took her statement and made her promise to let me do my job and to not do something drastic."

"And she listened?" Stiles had gotten a different impression on her from their first encounter. She was nobody to sit back and let others deal with her problems. With the exception of Peter, he was her left hand after all. But with him out of commission, she didn't have anybody to do the dirty work.

"She made it clear that she wants results." John nodded grimly. "Fast."

"Same."

Before he'd left the station to pick up Stiles, John had sent Parrish to pick up Kate Argent in hope that she would be waiting in an interrogation room for him by the time he came back in.

"You think she's still in Beacon Hills?"

"Most likely not but it's worth a shot."

John drove them over to his house where Stiles could have his shower and they would have a late dinner. John hadn't eaten much over the day either, too busy with the case. This was the biggest case Beacon Hills had seen in quite a while. The last one making headlines like this had been the drowning of four teenagers. Not that Stiles wanted to mention that case to John.

After a shower, some fresh clothes, and a sandwich which he washed down with a coffee, Stiles felt better. He had come up a bit early but the lingering ache in his bones was gone for now. He would have to return to the lake sooner than usual, though, he could feel it. Not that he would be able to do much in the middle of the night anyway. By now it was heading towards midnight.

So coffee was probably not the right thing right now, especially for John who had been on his feet basically since yesterday. Stiles didn't ask if he'd slept at all, he could see the answer all over John's face. And it looked like this would be a short night as well. John's phone ringed twice over dinner.

"You think I can see Peter?" Stiles asked when they were back in the car and on their way to the station.

"You should probably wait until morning," John reminded him. "He's in a coma but stable, you won't miss anything."

Coming from him Stiles believed it. Didn't mean he liked it.

"Talia wants to see you," John added.

"What does she want from me?" Stiles shrank into his seat. She'd been nice over dinner but he was not in the mood to face her again. Which he probably would have to anyway if he wanted to see Peter. Crap.

"Most likely she wants to thank you." John threw him a glance. "You saved her life. You saved her

whole pack."

There was nothing Stiles could say to that. But he could already feel how awkward that conversation would turn out.

"Did Parrish get Kate Argent?" John asked Nancy as soon as he entered the station.

"No," she answered. "Her apartment was empty. Forensics are on it and the warrant is out. Parrish went to talk to the brother."

"Doubt he's going to tell him anything but it's worth a shot," John agreed.

"It was a waste of time." Parrish stormed in just in time to catch John's statment. "Argent told me to come back with a warrant and closed the door in my face."

Parrish didn't look as if he'd gotten much sleep either, there were bags under his eyes and now he looked as if he was ready to punch somebody. He washed a hand down his face but then his eyes fell on Stiles.

"Shouldn't you rest?" He wondered. Narrowing his eyes, Parrish had a closer look at him. "You look better than I thought you would."

"Unlike others …" Stiles gave first Parrish then John a pointed look. "I had a good night's sleep. And unlike Peter, it looked worse than it was. Any news on him?" Stiles just had gotten an update from John but he wanted to distract Parrish. He did not want for Parrish to think too closely about him and his by now vanished injuries.

Parrish couldn't tell him much but Nancy chimed in with some news. Talia and Cora were staying with her but so far Talia only had made sure that Cora was all set. Aside from that, she hadn't left the hospital. She was managing everything from outside Peter's room.

"I would like to see him if that's okay with Talia," Stiles said, not sure if he was even welcomed at the hospital. The pack most likely wanted to keep to themselves at the moment.

"Of course," Nancy hurried to say. "You can come by whenever you want. Talia wants to speak to you, anyway. I don't think anybody has thanked you properly yet, without you …" She shook her head, unable to finish the sentence. She was not part of the inner core but she was pack, Stiles knew that. This had shaken her as well.

"Can we not make a big deal out of that?" Stiles pleaded.

"You're still a hero." Nancy gave him a shy smile.

Chapter 59

Parrish wanted to take Stiles' statement right now, he was burning with questions, but it was past midnight and everybody aside from Parrish agreed that the middle of the night was not the time for that.

"Go home and get some rest," John told Parrish which Stiles used to tell him the same. In the end, Nancy shooed them all out of the station.

John dropped Stiles off at the lake and he promised to get some sleep before he picked him up in the morning to visit Peter.

With nothing else to do, Stiles went under as well. His body still needed time to recover and this way the night wouldn't seem endless. Quite the opposite, down here he had to be careful to not miss John in the morning.

"Did you see Peter?" Derek welcomed him with open arms.

"No." Stiles let go with a sigh. "John is taking me to the hospital in the morning to see him."

"Why does he need a hospital?"

"He's in a coma." Stiles told him what little he knew, about the wolfsbane poisoning and the severe damage and that Peter's healing abilities were barely doing more than keeping him alive. Stiles would see for real in the morning and a part of him hoped to find Peter up and about by then.

"Did John find the ones who did it?" Derek asked when Stiles had finished his report.

"Everybody is looking for Kate and Parrish went to ask her brother about her but he's not cooperating." Stiles shook his head. "No sign of the other hunters either."

Derek was quiet for a long moment and Stiles started to give in to the lull of the slow back and forth of the water around him.

"Do you want me to go after them?" Derek asked quietly.

"You would do that?" Suddenly wide awake Stiles tried to read Derek. He'd never wanted to kill anybody. Every time he had drowned somebody Stiles had witnessed how withdrawn he became, how haunted. It had taken ages until Stiles had figured out why Derek retreated from him after such an incident and had started to offer comfort. It had helped. What made a difference was John who actually had the power to keep people away from the lake.

And here Derek was, offering to kill those hunters for Stiles.

"Yes," Derek answered and Stiles knew that he would do it right now if Stiles gave him the okay.

"Let's keep that as a last resort." Stiles held him back. "John is still investigating. Give him a chance to do his job."

"Okay." Derek accepted his decision easily and Stiles snuggled back into his presence.

"But if Peter dies, I will go after them," Derek added with grim determination that didn't leave room to argue.

"Didn't know you like him that much." Stiles hadn't seen this side of Derek before. He wanted to kill the ones who had hurt Peter.

"You like him that much." Derek wrapped himself more firmly around Stiles.

Stiles didn't know what to say to that so he just mumbled a *thank you* and let himself drift in Derek.

In the morning Stiles was pacing his cabin until it was time to meet John at the road. Without a phone he was completely out of the loop, Stiles didn't know if Peter was even alive.

"Last I heard, his condition hasn't changed," John tried to reassure him when Stiles bombarded him with questions the second he got in the car. Not that John was likely to know more, he hadn't been in the station yet. Stiles just hoped that he had slept a few hours.

To pacify him, John had brought coffee and donuts.

"I'm not even in the mood to joke about police officers and donuts," Stiles said around half a donut stuffed into his mouth. He washed it down with a healthy gulp of coffee.

"You okay?" John glanced at him.

"I'm better than Peter," Stiles said darkly. "I just hope that not half the pack is there as well." He probably couldn't avoid Talia but he was not ready to deal with the whole pack.

He had saved their lives, he couldn't deny it and he would do it again in a heart-beat, but he feared how they would treat him now because of that. He wasn't a hero. And for sure he didn't want to be their hero. He'd hated the Hales for way too long to just become friends with them. He could be civil, that wasn't the problem, and for Peter's sake he was willing to get to know them but he dreaded what was waiting for him at the hospital.

"I should have asked Derek to whisk me there in the middle of the night," Stiles mused when John parked the car.

"Too late." John patted his shoulder. "C'mon. They won't bite your head off. And you want to see Peter."

"Yeah." Stiles squared his shoulders. "That bastard is better alive in there."

John had been here before so Stiles just followed him to the right station.

Talia must have heard them because when they rounded a corner and reached the waiting area, she was standing and already facing their direction. That alone rubbed Stiles the wrong way but he gritted his teeth and put on a friendly face.

"John," she greeted the sheriff while Stiles stayed back.

"How is he?" John asked.

"The same."

"Stiles." Talia motioned for him to come closer. "I didn't get the chance to thank you the other day." She shook her head. "I didn't even think about thanking you, there was so much happening. Peter and Emily …"

"How's Emily by the way?" Stiles cut in before she could start her thank you speech.

She blinked at him but didn't insist on her speech.

"She's still here but they have transferred her to a normal room. They say that she's fine but they want to keep an eye on her at least until tomorrow. Just to make sure." She covered her mouth with her hand, a distant look on her face. Stiles remembered way too vividly how still the little girl had been. "You can visit her if you want. She wants to see you."

"I would like that." Stiles dared to relax. Today she wasn't the scary alpha. Her eyes were rimmed red and her cheeks hollow, Stiles wondered when she'd last slept and if she'd eaten recently. There was nobody else from the pack in sight but Stiles didn't know if that was for his benefit or if they had other things to do. With the whole house gone there were a lot of things to do, he guessed. But at least with a pack this big, the alpha didn't have to do everything herself.

"But first I would like to see Peter," Stiles said. "If that's okay?"

"Of course." Talia tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "This way. They won't let anybody in, though."

Her hand was twitching as if she desperately wanted to touch Peter. Stiles didn't know much about the dynamics in a pack but he knew that werewolves were tactile creatures. They needed the closeness of the pack, they needed to touch each other. He didn't want to imagine how Talia must be feeling. One of her pack, her brother, was hurt, maybe dying, and she couldn't even sit at his side. The only thing she could do was to watch him through a window.

Which was not that spectacular, Stiles found out.

Lots of white in a small room. Peter was on a vent and his whole body was covered with some white stuff that almost looked as if it was floating over him. Half his face was covered as well so Stiles couldn't see the extent of the damage but the glimpses he got through the floating stuff were enough to twist his stomach.

"You can come by whenever you want," Talia assured him. "I think he would like that."

Stiles gritted his teeth at that statement but didn't say what was on his mind.

Because Talia didn't know shit about what Peter would like or not like. He was lying in a fucking coma. Why was he even still in a coma? He should be better by now. Stiles blinked against the tears.

Next to him, Talia shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other. Stiles didn't want to know what kinds of emotions she was smelling on him. Not that he cared.

Stiles couldn't stand watching Peter for long. So after a few minutes of awkwardness, John kept Talia distracted for which Stiles was grateful, he thanked Talia and fled the station. John had to hurry to catch up with him.

On their way out, they stopped to see Emily. Her mom was with her and she caught Stiles in a fierce hug before he was even through the door. Awkwardly Stiles patted her back.

"You saved my baby girl." She brought some distance between them and wiped her eyes with the heel of her hand. "Thank you. It's not enough but I don't know what else to say, just thank you." She was gearing up for another round of tears so Stiles hurried to duck around her to have a look at Emily.

"Hey," Stiles greeted her with a broad smile. "You look way better today."

They had to cut her hair and she had raw patches on her face and hands but all in all she looked good. Way less dead but he didn't tell her that.

"Mom says that you saved my life," she said, looking at him with big eyes.

"Peter helped." Stiles sat down on the edge of the bed. "He got you out of your room and almost to the stairs. I doubt I would have found you in time if I didn't stumble over you there." The working theory was that Peter had been right next to one of those wolfsbane grenades the hunters had shot into the house. He'd most likely been shielding Emily with his body but had gotten the brunt of it. Somehow he'd still managed to get them down the hallway. Not that Stiles would tell her the details.

"And Derek." Stiles moved the story forward to not dwell on Peter for too long. "He was the one who got us out of the house." Without him, Peter would be dead for sure. Stiles wasn't even sure if he would have been able to get Emily out without Derek's help.

"He brought us to the lake." Emily nodded but then she pouted. "I didn't even see him."

"You'll meet him," Stiles promised. "And then you're going to beat him at Uno."

"I lost my cards." The pout deepened. "Everything is gone. The whole house is gone. How can a house begone?"

"We'll build a new house." Deborah sat down on her other side. "We'll get you new toys. New Uno cards. We're all alive and well, the rest we can replace."

Getting uncomfortable with all the heartfelt Stiles stood and gestured awkwardly to John who was standing by the door.

"I'll come by again soon but my uncle needs to get back to work," Stiles excused them. "With my car gone, I need a driver to get around and John is kinda busy with finding those hunters." He noticed that he was babbling and hurried to flee the room before things became too awkward.

"I hate all this sappy stuff." Stiles groaned once he was sure that there were no werewolves around to hear him. "Why can't they just leave it?"

"Without you, they would all be dead," John reminded him.

"Yeah, yeah." Stiles didn't want to hear it. "By the way, did my car survive?" So far he hadn't dared to ask about his jeep but now he needed a change of topic.

"Sorry." John shook his head.

"Dammit." Stiles stuffed his hands in his pockets. "She died an honorable death."

"We'll get you another car," John promised while he climbed into his cruiser.

It wouldn't be the same, though.

They were halfway to the station when John got the message that they had found Kate's car.

"You're going to stay in the car." John gave Stiles a stern look before he turned the car around and switched on the lights. Stiles gave him kudos for not trying to dump him somewhere. "No wandering around the scene."

Stiles just rolled his eyes at him. As if he was stupid enough to contaminate a scene like that.

Kate's car had been found a few miles out of Beacon Hills and by the time they arrived, Parrish was already there, examining the contents of the trunk. Just when John parked the car, he came up with something.

"Is that a grenade launcher?"

Chapter 60

It was a grenade launcher.

That much became clear when they approached Parrish who was holding up the weapon in question with clear disbelief on his face. It matched John's expression.

"Where the fuck did she get a grenade launcher?" Parrish asked, seeking help from his boss but John was still trying to comprehend what he was seeing.

"Well, her brother is an arms dealer," Stiles piped up but at the same time, he wanted to throw up. This was what the hunters had used to launch their homemade wolfsbane grenades into the Hale house. After they had sealed it with mountain ash.

"Argent didn't say anything about grenade launchers." Parrish carefully put it back in the trunk and took a step back, still eyeing it as if he expected it too shoot a grenade at him.

"Did you ask him about them?" Stiles couldn't help but ask at which Parrish glared at him.

"Why are you even here?" The deputy asked. "This is an ongoing investigation. Do I have to remind you that you are part of what we are investigating?" Parrish asked but he was looking at John for an explanation of why Stiles was there.

"He promised to stay in the car, didn't he?" John gave him a look to which Stiles backed off. He stayed close enough to see and hear everything, though. Not that there was anything interesting happening. John had a look into the car himself but made sure to not touch anything. Then they were just waiting for the truck to tow the car in. Forensics would have a closer look back at the station.

"The Argents have family in France," Parrish pointed out. "Bet she's already halfway there."

John nodded grimly to that.

It was more than likely that Kate had fled the area right after the attack, Stiles had to agree. Why her brother was still here, he didn't know, though.

"I want to talk to Chris," John decided and he was about to send Parrish off to bring him into the station but Stiles stepped in.

"You think he'll rat out his own sister just because you ask nicely?" Stiles asked John in a low voice. What he was about to say was not for Parrish's ears.

"Do you have a better idea?" John asked, the sarcasm clear in his voice.

"To ask not nicely." Stiles gave him a predatory grin. It still took some talking but in the end, Stiles was with John on the way to have a chat with Chris while Parrish stayed back to bring in the car.

Chris didn't seem surprised to see the sheriff at his door but he did raise an eyebrow at Stiles.

"Can I come in?" John asked.

"Do you have a warrant?" Chris crossed his arms over his chest, blocking the door.

"We can have this talk here or at the station, your choice." John put his hands on his hips, not

actually on his gun but close enough to make the point.

"Come back when you have the papers for that." Chris moved to close the door in John's face which Stiles used to slip past him.

"Hey!" Chris tried to hold him back but Stiles ducked out of his reach and was in the house.

"Keep your kid in line." Torn between following Stiles and keeping John out, Chris didn't know what to do.

"I think we have established that I have no relations with John," Stiles said over his shoulder and strolled into the living room. "Hello, Mrs. Argent."

"Out of my house." She fixed him with a cold glare which Stiles chose to ignore.

"Or what?" Stiles had a look at the photos on the mantle of the fireplace. "You're going to call the police on me?"

From the door he heard an amused huff from John who went into full sheriff mode a second later: "Sir, I think you have an intruder in your house. For your own safety, stay back and let me handle the situation."

Stiles half-expected him to draw his gun to complete the picture but sadly, he didn't go that far. John used the moment of confusion and marched past Chris.

Accepting his defeat, Chris closed the door and followed John to the living room.

"What do you want?" Chris asked once they were all standing there between flowery curtains and cross-stitches on the wall.

"We found Kate's car. With a grenade launcher in the trunk. Care to explain how she got her hands on one of those?" John stood in the middle of the room, hands on his hips again.

"I have no idea." Chris sat down in one of the chairs and reluctantly his wife followed his lead. Like a fifties housewife she was sitting on the sofa, her hands in her lap, but Stiles didn't get fooled for one second. He wouldn't be surprised if there was a gun hidden between the throw pillows.

"You're her brother and an arms dealer," John stated. "That's enough reason to believe that she got that weapon from you. Which would make you an accomplice."

"Prove it."

"How about no." Stiles stepped in. John had his fun but there was still Peter, fighting for his life. They didn't have time for games. "You are going to tell us everything we want to know. Now."

"Who are you?" Victoria asked. "And why would we tell you anything?"

Stiles turned back to the mantle and picked up one of the framed photos.

"This your daughter?" The picture had been taken at a sports event. Archery if he was not mistaken. "Allison, right? She's currently staying with your father in France."

"Is this an attempt to threaten us?" Chris seemed to be amused by that idea.

"Actually." Stiles put the photo back. "Yes, it is. Do you remember Derek? Big guy, came in here one night? You tried to shoot him and he almost drowned you?"

That got him their attention.

"So you lied when you said that you don't have control over him," Chris said and leaned back in his chair.

"I can't tell him what to do." Stiles studied the other pictures. "But I can ask. And right now I am the only thing standing between you and a wet death."

"You're the sheriff." Chris turned to John. "Shouldn't you do something about this? I'm pretty sure it's illegal to threaten us like this."

"Oh, you misunderstood." Stiles didn't give John the chance to say something but it looked like he didn't have the intention to intervene anyway. "Derek wants to kill you. He wants to come after everybody involved in the fire. I saw Kate fleeing the scene so she'll be the first he's coming after but he won't stop there. Derek would like to kill the others who have tried to burn a whole family alive but without names, he'll just go after the ones he knows."

Stiles turned away from the pictures and gave the Argents his full attention.

"You." Stiles nodded at Chris. "Your wife here. Your father, your daughter. Don't think that they're safe in France. He's going to kill your whole family. Just like Kate tried to kill the whole Hale family." He paused to let his words sink in. "The only reason you're not dead already is that I asked him not to come after you. But if you don't start talking now, I'm going to rethink my decision."

"Allison has nothing to do with this." If anything Victoria became even icier.

"Neither had the nine-year-old I had to give mouth to mouth to," Stiles countered. "Her only fault has been that she was born into a werewolf family. But that was enough for Kate to want her dead."

"Stiles." John stepped in. "That's enough."

John took a seat in the other chair and gestured for Stiles to take a seat as well. The only spot left was next to Victoria on the couch and Stiles almost felt the icy waves coming off her when he sat down.

"I don't want anybody to die," John stated. "But if Derek decides to come after you, there's nothing I can do to stop him. Sadly, the same goes for this one." He jerked his thumb in Stiles' direction.

"You could arrest this little brat," Victoria suggested. "He is threatening to get us killed."

"How often did you arrest me?" Stiles asked, trying to recall how often it had been. Not that often, John had soon realized that there was no way to hold him.

"I stopped when your escape trick started to get me in trouble." John pinched the bridge of his nose at that memory.

"He tried stern talks after that," Stiles told the Argents. "At some point, he started to feed me."

"And I never got rid of you again." John let out a sigh. "However, point is that I have no control over Stiles or Derek. I cannot protect you. When your buddies kidnapped and tortured Stiles, they crossed a line. You know what happened to Daniel Page. I don't want any more dead people. What I want is for your sister and her friends to face the consequences of what they did. In court."

Chris thought about it for a long moment but Stiles knew that it was only for show.

Chris started to talk.

Kate had gotten the grenade launchers from him. Four in total which went along with what they had deducted from the scene.

"That was months ago," Chris said. "I didn't know what she was planning but when I heard that she was substituting as a teacher at a High School, I followed her here to keep an eye on her."

"You did a really good job there." Stiles let the sarcasm drip from his voice.

Chris glared at him.

"She stayed low for weeks and I think that she used the time to become friendly with a member of the pack."

"To gain some intel." Stiles nodded, it made sense.

"For a while, I thought that she had seduced Peter …," Chris started but was interrupted by Stiles.

"Peter?" Stiles' voice toppled over in disbelief.

"He's a single man, living in the main house," Victoria spoke up. "We heard rumors that he's seeing someone. He's been single since his wife's death. All Kate had to do was to make pretty eyes at him."

"Peter?" Stiles repeated because obviously, they had no clue what they were talking about. At all. "Peter is the left hand of the pack and suspicious as hell, the only reason he would date Kate, and he would know that she's a hunter in five seconds flat, would be to gain intel on her. He would love that dance, trying to outsmart each other. But no, he's not dating Kate."

"Better men have been blinded by a woman." Victoria gave him an almost pitiful look. As if his faith in Peter was adorable.

"If Kate was using somebody from the pack like that, it's not Peter," Stiles said, already going over the inner core of the pack in his mind. Walter was single. Anthony and Michael were both married but that was not a reason to rule them out just yet. Boyd was head over heels for Erica, him Stiles ruled out immediately. Besides, Boyd would be a bit young for Kate. Same for Isaac. Not that that was a reason to rule out anyone either. Stiles liked Isaac but the seventeen-year-old was still a teenager. And with that easy to impress and to manipulate. Kate had not been teaching his grade but she could have approached him at school. Maybe they should have a talk with him. Stiles glanced over to John, making a mental note to bring this up later.

"What makes you so sure that it's not Peter?" Victoria wasn't buying it.

"Because I'm the one he's seeing."

"You?"

"But you're what? Sixteen?" Chris made a disgusted face, probably adding one more reason to his list of why he disliked werewolves.

"I was eighteen," Stiles corrected. Why was everyone making him younger than he should be? "But by now you can add a zero. And no, I'm not going to tell you why."

Before anybody could say something to that, Derek came in through the kitchen door.

"Stiles."

Chapter 61

"Fuck." Stiles slumped down in his seat while Chris swirled around to face the intruder and Victoria had her hand between the braided cushions. On a gun, no doubt.

"Didn't expect you this soon." John was the only one unfazed by Derek's sudden appearance but he was facing the door and must have seen him before he'd spoken up.

"I didn't stay under as long as I should have," Stiles admitted. It was not an exact science but whenever he got injured, like when he ran into a burning house, he needed to stay under longer to fully recover. When he cut it short like today, his time away from Derek became more limited.

"I wanted to buy a new phone before you show up," Stiles whined. It had been an optimistic plan even without the detour to interrogate the Argents. However, not having a phone sucked. Not having a car sucked too but the phone thing was the one easier to fix.

"Are you arresting them?" Derek asked John, ignoring Stiles.

"Not yet," John said. "But they were just telling us about the other hunters involved."

"What are their names?" Derek asked and crossed his arms over his chest. He glared at the Argents from under thick eyebrows and the fact that there was a growing puddle around his feet just emphasized that he was not human.

"What are you going to do once you have their names?" Chris asked.

"For now? Nothing." Derek nodded over to John. "But if he can't punish them by human laws, I will punish them."

"Why do you even care about those filthy animals?" Victoria asked.

"Their names."

Stiles would have liked to stay for longer, John was asking about locations and likely accomplices and things like that but for Derek, a name was enough. Stiles didn't know how he was able to distinguish one John Smith from the other but once Derek knew the name of a person, he could find them anywhere.

So once Chris had told him the names, Derek was no longer interested in the conversation.

"Stiles." He urged him.

"Yeah, yeah." Stiles made. "Keep me updated." He waved at John and followed Derek into the kitchen. Chris came after them and Stiles would have loved to see his face when Derek whisked them away through the kitchen sink but then he was already in the lake.

"Sorry for interrupting," Derek said.

"Not your fault." Stiles let out a sigh. Now that he allowed his body to relax, he felt the lingering aches in his bones. He needed a little more time to recover.

"How's Peter?"

"Stable." The image of Peter lying in that sterile room would haunt him for quite a while, that was

for sure. Especially since it looked as if his condition wouldn't change anytime soon.

Stiles didn't want to think about that and down here with Derek, he didn't have to think. He let himself sink deeper and then he was just drifting in Derek's presence.

When Stiles came back to his cabin it was past ten in the evening.

He had another email from John with an update. Peter was still in a coma but Emily would be allowed to go home tomorrow. Wherever home was for her at the moment. The house was gone. Stiles hadn't asked but he'd heard something about the Hales staying with various members of the pack living in town. It was a big pack and most of them hadn't been living at the main house anyway.

So far there hadn't been any arrests but the warrants were out and the whole department was on the case. Things like this needed time, Stiles got that. It was still frustrating.

Stiles wrote a short answer to John and he even remembered to mention Isaac as the possible contact Kate had in the pack. John might have talked to him already but Stiles wanted to bring it up just in case.

It was possible that a member of the pack with ill intent had deliberately been working with Kate but it was more likely that she'd used somebody without him realizing what she was doing. He probably should let Talia know about this as well but that was John's job. Maybe he'd already spoken with her, who knew? For sure not Stiles who had been under the whole fucking day.

Besides, Stiles was not keen on meeting the alpha or anybody else from the pack. He was not their hero. He just wanted to be left alone. On the other hand, he wanted to check on Peter.

It was late, he didn't want to bother John, the man needed some sleep, but without his car, Stiles' options were limited. He didn't want to wait until morning, he wanted to see Peter now.

"Derek?" Stiles walked out to the shore. He would arrive at the hospital dripping wet, if Derek was even willing to take him there, but he didn't care.

"Yes?" Derek's head popped out of the water. He must have been lingering nearby. Stiles had expected that he had to dive into the lake to get his attention.

"Would you bring me to Peter?"

To Stiles' surprise, Derek said yes and a second later they were standing in a restroom.

"At least it's a men's restroom," Stiles muttered under his breath while he tried to wring as much water out of his clothes as possible. "Do you even know the difference between a ladies' restroom and one for men? And why you shouldn't just pop up in the wrong one?"

More babbling to himself Stiles didn't expect an answer. Why Derek even stuck around, he didn't know. He'd expected him to just drop him off and to disappear right after.

Stiles threw away the paper towels he'd used to dry off his face and hair and opened the door to peek outside. They had to be close to Peter's room, Derek knew where he was going, but Stiles didn't recognize the hallway.

"This way." Derek stepped past him and turned left.

"You know, that ability of yours is useful but creepy as fuck." Stiles fell in step with him. Usually,

he was on the receiving end of Derek's stalking, it was a rare occasion that he saw the other side.

At this time of the night, Stiles didn't expect to run into anybody from the pack. There was nothing they could do anyway, the doctors didn't even allow anybody in the room with Peter.

"Cora?" Stiles asked when they rounded a corner and he spotted her standing at the window, looking into Peter's room.

She swirled around with a yelp.

"Stiles?" She asked but her eyes zoomed in on Derek. "Is that …?"

They hadn't met before but there were not many people associated with Stiles who would be walking around in damp clothes with their hair plastered to their skull. If nothing else, the wet trail Derek was leaving everywhere he went, was a dead giveaway.

"This is Derek," Stiles confirmed. "Derek, this is Cora Hale."

Derek gave her a nod but walked right past her to the window.

"How is Peter?" He asked.

"Still the same," Cora answered, studying Derek's back. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to see Peter." Stiles stepped up to have a look himself. "Shouldn't his healing increase with time?" It had been two days. For a human two days were nothing but a werewolf could recover from near-death three times over that time.

"I don't know." Her voice broke.

Having a closer look at her, Stiles could tell that she'd been crying. Her face was red and blotchy, her eyes rimmed red and she could use a tissue. Sniffling she wiped her eyes with the heel of her hand.

Stiles didn't know what to do. He just stood there, wringing his hands, while he waited for her to compose herself.

"John got the names of the hunters who did this," Stiles said just to fill the awkward silence. "The whole department is working on the case, they will catch them. They will pay for this." It wouldn't help Peter, Stiles was painfully aware of that fact, but it would get the pack some closure for what they had been through.

"If he can't arrest them, I will come after them," Derek said. "They can't hide from me."

Cora looked up at him with big eyes.

"You'll come after everybody who has something to do with the fire?" She asked. She had red spots high on her cheeks but under that she was pale and she looked as if she was about to start crying again.

"Yes." Derek looked her straight in the eye. "They will all pay."

"Before we start with the drowning we let John do his job, don't we?" Stiles put a hand on Derek's forearm. He seemed a little too eager to go after those hunters.

"I should leave," Cora said, her voice cracking. She hurried away but at the corner, she stopped.

"Thank you. Both of you. Without you …" She was choking on tears again.

Before Stiles could say anything, she fled around the corner.

"This is really getting to her," Stiles said once they were alone. Not that he blamed her. She'd been trapped in a burning house and barely escaped with her life. Her whole family had almost died and Peter was still in a coma. What was visible of his skin still looked like raw meat.

For long minutes Stiles and Derek stood there, watching Peter through the glass. The only movement in the room was Peter's chest rising with every woosh of the vent but that got old rather quickly.

"Do you want to come home with me?" Derek asked.

"No." Stiles shook his head. "I think I want to stay for a little while longer."

Derek accepted it with a nod and left him alone.

Stiles watched Peter through the glass, lost in thoughts. This was not right. Peter didn't deserve this.

"Stiles?" Somebody pulled him out of his thoughts.

"Scott?" Stiles had expected somebody from the pack so it took him a moment to comprehend that it was Scott who was coming over to him in a little jog. "What are you doing here?"

It was almost midnight in the middle of the week. Scott had school tomorrow. Well, technically so had Stiles but he figured with him recovering from running into a burning house he could take the week off. But they should find an excuse to take him out of school permanently, there was no point in going any longer.

"Mom's pulling a double shift, I brought her a later dinner," Scott explained with an easy grin. "What are you doing here?"

"Your mom works here?" Stiles asked to distract him and walked them away from Peter's room.

"She's a nurse in the ER." With a suspicious look around Scott's voice dropped into a whisper. "Is it true that you saved Cora's family? They say you drove your car through the front door when it was stuck. And that you ran back in because there were still people missing."

"Yeah, that was me." Stiles rubbed the back of his head. It had been all over the news but they had kept his name out. But Beacon Hills was a small town and he was the sheriff's nephew, word got around.

Of course, Scott had questions. How couldn't he? His best friend was a hero. Scott wanted to know everything but this was not the right place for this so they somehow ended up at Scott's place. It looked like they would have a sleepover.

"Don't you have to call your uncle?" Scott asked when they were getting comfortable in his room.

"He's pulling a double shift as well." Stiles lied easily.

On their way here they had stopped to get pizza and now they were having midnight pizza on the floor in Scott's room while Stiles told him in detail about his dinner with the Hales. Minus the werewolf part and the part about him dating Peter, of course. And how that had ended with him

running into the burning house.

"Man." Scott reached for another slice of pizza. "You're insane."

"Peter and Emily were still in there." Stiles shrugged. "I had to do something."

"Still insane." Scott fought with a string of cheese but he was grinning like an idiot. "Is it true that it wasn't an accident? They say that it has been the same people who kidnapped you and the others."

"It's a theory," Stiles answered vaguely. Scott didn't know about werewolves and hunters so to him this was somebody attacking a well-liked family for no reason.

They spent half the night coming up with more and more ridiculous theories of who was behind this and why. It was easy fun.

Chapter 62

When Derek showed up to fetch Stiles around four in the morning, Scott was fast asleep. Which probably was for the better, it was a school day after all. And that way Stiles didn't have to come up with an explanation for the man suddenly standing in Scott's bedroom door.

Stiles scribbled a quick note on the empty pizza box, saying that he was sorry for leaving in the middle of the night like this.

"Man, I feel like I'm sneaking out after a one-night-stand," Stiles muttered when he followed Derek to the bathroom.

"Did you sleep with him?" Derek asked.

"Doubt he swings that way." Stiles glanced back at where Scott was softly snoring in his bed. Stiles had known that he wouldn't be able to spend the whole night but he hadn't objected when Scott had pulled out the inflatable mattress. It had been comfy for discussing their conspiracy theories.

"Besides, he's not my type. I like them more mature." Scott was a teenager and it showed. "I'm more into the sassy bastards."

"Like Peter?" Derek asked and stepped into the shower.

"I like him." Stiles shrugged. The next second they were in the lake. "I might even love him."

Here in the depth of the lake, he could admit it. Here only Derek was able to hear his confession and he wouldn't judge.

"Will he recover?" Derek asked in his neutral tone but Stiles sensed more behind his words.

"I don't know." Stiles let himself sag into Derek. This was the worst. Seeing Peter like this, not knowing if he would ever wake up again, Stiles didn't like it. In a way, it would have been easier if Peter had died in the fire.

"The Hale pack still owes me a member of their pack," Derek said.

"You mean …?" Stiles had been ready to let himself drift but he snapped awake at that suggestion. "Would that even work? I mean would he heal?"

Thinking back, Stiles had recovered from death before. It had taken time but he'd gotten better once he'd been with Derek in the lake. That combined with the healing abilities of a werewolf …

"Yes," Derek confirmed, he sounded sure. Stiles didn't even know if he was capable of lying. He never sugarcoated anything either. "But he would have to stay with us."

Forever, Stiles got that.

"Do you want that?" Derek asked.

"Do you?" Stiles asked. And the more important question, did Peter want to stay with them? He was in a coma, there was no way to ask him.

"I wouldn't mind having him here," Derek answered.

Stiles narrowed his eyes on him, trying to figure him out.

"You like him," Stiles realized. This was not just because Stiles liked Peter. Stiles liked John and he doubted that Derek would make such an offer if it were the sheriff lying in a coma. "That's why you're so invested in this."

Stiles had not seen Derek interested in earthly matters like this ever before. Derek didn't care about what was going on in town, he didn't care about people. For some reason, he did care about Peter, though.

Derek didn't say anything to that.

"I have to think about this," Stiles finally said when it became clear that Derek would not explain his reasoning. "He's not actively dying, no need to make rash decisions."

He should probably talk to Talia first anyway. She was Peter's alpha and his sister if anybody she was the person who could make a decision like this for Peter.

When Stiles broke through the surface it had to be late in the afternoon. At least judging by the sun which was about to disappear behind the trees.

His clothes were dripping wet again but without a car, he didn't have another choice but to take Derek's expressway back to the lake.

At least the car had died an honorable death. But he should get a replacement soon, relying on John and Derek to get around was not a long term solution. And while he was at it, he should get a new phone as well. Stiles still had the five hundred bucks Peter had given him for the information on the hunter, that should at least cover the phone. The phone situation was the more pressing problem anyway.

Fighting with his wet clothes, Stiles stalked out of the lake and only noticed the box at his door when he almost stumbled over it.

He carried it inside but took the time to change into dry clothes before he opened the package.

It was a care package. Canned goods, coffee, snacks. There was an envelope on top which would probably explain all this but what caught Stiles' eye was a box which looked suspiciously like a new phone.

"No way." Stiles held the box in his hands. It had been opened before. The reason for that became clear when Stiles took the phone out of the box. The screen lit up with two messages waiting for him. From Talia and John, both contacts were already on his list.

Talia's message was just a short update on Peter, not that there was anything to update. Still in a coma, still not healing.

John's message was more optimistic. They had caught one of the hunters. Not Kate, though, but it was a start.

Before he answered any of the messages, Stiles put the phone aside and reached for the letter. It was from Talia, thee pages, handwritten. But there was something else in the envelope.

Dumbfounded Stiles stared at the key in his hand.

He set the key aside for now, he was not ready to deal with that, and started reading. Like

expected, Talia thanked him for saving her family. The care package was from all the people who had donated food and other essentials to the Hale family but since they had lots of family in town, and were filthy rich, not that Talia mentioned that part, they didn't need most of it. So Talia had decided to donate it to other people in need. Looked like Stiles counted as a person in need. He barked out a laugh at that.

The phone and the car, because yes, there was a car waiting for him at the road, were a little *thank you* from the pack.

I know it's far from enough, Talia wrote, *but the least I can do is to replace what you've lost when you saved my family.*

Stiles got misty eyes just reading the stupid letter.

Talia ended by saying that her door was always open for him and if Stiles needed anything, he should just tell her.

Overwhelmed with all this, Stiles grabbed the key and walked outside to check out his new car.

It was a jeep, parked in the usual spot. It wasn't his old car but the fact alone that it was a jeep tightened Stiles' throat.

The car was new. It smelled new. Of course, he had to take her for a ride. Stiles started the engine and then he was on the road. He didn't have a destination in mind, he wanted to visit Peter and drop by the station at some point but for now, he just drove.

Half an hour later, he found himself on the other side of town, on his way to the Hale house. Stiles parked the car before he rounded the last corner and walked the last bit.

The house was a blackened ruin. It was missing half its roof and the empty windows were looking down on Stiles, daring him to come closer. The front door was just a jagged mouth, the frame broken and splintered from the collision with Stiles' car.

Everything was closed off with tape and Stiles was not stupid enough to go into the house, it didn't look safe at all. Not that that had stopped him the other night when flames had been licking out of the windows. The fire was long put out but the smell of ash and smoke still lingered in the air.

"Didn't expect anybody to be out here." Suddenly somebody spoke up behind him. Stiles swirled around to which the elderly woman raised her hands to indicate that she meant no harm. Pamela Hale, Stiles recognized her. She was a werewolf so even if she wasn't the youngest anymore, she most likely was still way faster and stronger than him.

"I'm sorry." Stiles took a step back. "I shouldn't be out here, I know." This was the wrong side of town for him, he knew that. "I'm leaving."

"Please stay." Pamela held him back. "You can come out here whenever you like. Not that there's much to see at the moment." She put a hand on her hip and studied the ruin that used to be her home.

"Thanks to you it's not a grave," she added after a long second.

"I should leave." Stiles was not in the mood for this. Interacting with the pack had been difficult before the fire, now Stiles didn't know how to act at all.

"I came here to see if anything from the garden is salvageable," Pamela said. "Would you like to

join me? I might need a second pair of hands."

At least she was not hero-worshiping him.

"You think there's something left?" Stiles asked and now he wanted to know the answer to that.

"Only one way to find out." Pamela winked at him and then she was leading the way around the shell of a house to the back. There was a shed that was a bit singed around the edges and covered with ash but otherwise it was still standing.

The garden itself was far enough from the house to not have been damaged by the fire itself but the water and people stomping around had done quite some damage.

"Doesn't look like there's much left." Stiles had a look around.

"Figured that much." Pamela let out a sigh and carefully made her way through the muddy mess that used to be beds of various vegetables. Stiles hadn't paid much attention to them when he'd been walking around here with Peter but he remembered way more green. That had been when Peter had stolen his bag. It felt like it had been ages ago.

"The ash is a good fertilizer." Pamela had a critical look around. "You'll see, next year we'll harvest more than we can eat."

"You want to come back here?" Stiles had a look around, at the ruined garden and the house.

"Of course," Pamela answered without hesitation. As if leaving this place had never crossed her mind. It made sense. The house was beyond saving but the Hales had rebuild it before. They had lived here for generations, this was their home.

"Talia is still busy with the insurance stuff and with Peter of course." She shook her head at that reminder. "But she and a few others are already making plans for a new house. They don't scare us away that easily." She smiled at him.

"Any news on Peter?" Stiles asked. Talia's message was already a few hours old.

"No." The smile died on her lips and for a moment she just looked into the distance. "He's fighting but he's not getting better."

"You have a little more distance than Talia," Stiles said carefully. "What would you say, what are his chances to wake up anytime soon?"

"Honestly?" She made her way out of the muddy part back to where Stiles was standing on a solid patch of grass. "Not good. He is healing but way too slowly. If his healing doesn't increase it will take his body years to recover. If he recovers at all. His body can still give out at any point."

That was not what Stiles had wanted to hear but he'd kind of expected this answer.

Deep in thoughts, he said goodbye to Pamela. He promised to not be a stranger, a promise he wasn't sure he intended to keep, and returned to his new car.

Putting off Talia for later, Stiles drove back into town. He needed to talk to John. He wanted to know what was going on with the hunter they had in custody but more importantly, he needed to talk to someone about Derek's offer.

Chapter 63

"That's quite an offer." John leaned back in his chair, chopsticks loosely in his hand. Since it was about dinner time and Stile knew that John was more than likely to forget about food, he'd brought some Chinese.

"Yeah." Stiles made around a mouthful of fried rice. "Didn't expect it at all."

"Are you considering it?" John asked. "I mean, you would have to spend eternity with him."

Stiles had thought about it. The last few hours he'd done nothing but thinking about it.

"Yes," Stiles answered. "I know that it has the potential to turn into the most epic War of Roses since Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner but I'm willing to risk it. I can't just let him vegetate in a coma from which he might never wake up again. I can't." Stiles huffed and stuffed more rice into his mouth. "But …" He emphasized the word with his chopsticks. "That's not my decision to make. I was never given a choice, I can not do the same to Peter."

"That's quite a predicament you got yourself into."

"You telling me." Stiles stabbed the contents of his container with the chopsticks. "My best shot is to ask Talia. She knows him better than me, she's his alpha and his sister. If anyone, she's the one to make a decision like this in Peter's name." He'd said the same thing to Derek earlier but Stiles needed to repeat it a few times to convince himself that he should talk to Talia.

"Did you know that she got me a new phone and a car?" Stiles changed the topic. "And a care package."

"She came to me and asked if you have a replacement yet," John said. "As for the care package, the whole town is going nuts with trying to help out. Donations are running at the schools and whole services are dedicated to the Hale family. The church has collected a ton of clothes and other stuff. Did you read the papers? Talia gave a statement, thanking the whole town. She said that it was way too much and that she would give some of it to other people in need."

"Yeah, to me," Stiles muttered.

"Among others."

To change the topic Stiles asked about the hunter they had in custody. Who turned out to be a pain in the ass. He wasn't talking and without a confession they had problems, placing him at the scene. The whole department was working overtime.

"They offered him a deal," John said. "We're talking about attempted murder in fourteen cases here not counting the other charges. He's still thinking about it." John made a face.

"Can't Chris give an official statement?" Stiles asked. What the hunter had told them the other day had helped a lot but it was nothing official so they couldn't use it in court.

"He would rather not." John shook his head. "Ratting out another hunter might put him and his family in danger."

"Don't they have a code?" Stiles asked. "If Kate violates the code shouldn't she be cast out or something?"

"To a lot of hunters only a dead werewolf is a good werewolf, you know that," John reminded him. "They would consider you not human either and hunt you down if they knew about you."

"I know." Angrily Stiles stuffed more rice into his mouth. It had been before he'd met John but there had been hunters who had looked past the local werewolf pack and had come for Derek instead. And with that for Stiles as well. Not that it had ended well for the hunters. Their attempts to harm Derek had been more amusing than anything else but when they'd come for Stiles … let's say they found a wet grave rather quickly.

"Okay, I'll leave you to do your sheriff thing and I'm going to see if Talia has a minute." Stiles put his half-eaten food aside, he'd lost his appetite. But putting off Talia for longer would only make things worse. For him and Peter. They said that one didn't feel anything in a coma but Stiles had read about people who had been aware of everything going on around them. Was Peter feeling the pain right now? Was he screaming in his head in agony while Stiles was sitting here, eating fried rice?

"Do you want me to come with you?" John asked, probably seeing all the tells of how much Stiles did not want to talk to Talia.

"Doubt she's going to bite my head off." Stiles tried to joke but suddenly he just felt nauseous. "She bought me a new car."

His fear of the alpha was not rational, he knew that, but fear never was. But this was for Peter.

Stiles left the station and then he was sitting in his car for long minutes before he'd gathered the courage to write a message to Talia. Mainly he was thanking her for all the gifts. And if they could meet somewhere?

Stiles sent the message out and with that, it was out of his hands. When she didn't answer after a minute Stiles figured that she wouldn't answer anytime soon, she was probably having dinner with her family. He put the car in gear and headed back to the lake.

He was halfway there when his phone chimed with a new message.

Talia wanted to head out to the hospital in a bit, if that worked for him?

Neutral ground, Stiles had to give her kudos for that. He answered that he would be there and turned the car around. He would be early but he had nothing better to do at the moment.

At the hospital, he ran into Scott. Literally. Scott had been looking over his shoulder, waving at somebody, and didn't pay attention to where he was going. Stiles on the other hand had kept his head down, his mind elsewhere. They collided with an *uff*.

"Stiles?"

"Hey, man." Stiles rubbed the back of his head. He hadn't even thought about Scott all day. After he'd bailed out on him last night, he'd totally forgotten about the teenager.

"Is that your friend?" The woman Scott had been waving to came over to them. "Stiles, right? Scott told me about you."

"I hope he didn't." Stiles joked, wondering why he was running into random people today. First Pamela and now Scott and his mother. "Did Scott bring you dinner again? I'm just coming from the station, my uncle would forget to eat if I didn't remind him." He was rambling now but he didn't know what else to do.

"Same here," Mrs. McCall admitted and put an arm around her son's shoulders. "But I have this lifesaver here."

"The lifesaver is Stiles." Scott didn't try to wiggle out of his mother's hold and just beamed at Stiles with her arm still around his shoulders. "He's the one who ran into a burning house to save people."

"Can we not do that?" Stiles squirmed while he had a glance around if anybody was paying attention to them. They had kept his name out of the papers and he liked it that way. It was bad enough that the whole pack thought of him as some kind of hero. Which was half the town. The other half didn't need to know. Besides, drawing too much attention had never been good for him. Peter had never gotten around to finish the ID thing he'd promised him. Speaking of Peter …

"I couldn't save all of them." Stiles let out a breath. Since he'd gotten to know the Hales, he'd started to tolerate them, some he even liked, but the one he actually cared about was the one he hadn't been able to save.

"Nobody died." Mrs. McCall let go of her son and gently placed a hand on Stiles' shoulder. "You went back for the little girl and you got her out. I was working in the ER that night, I was there when they came in. I treated the burns and monitored their breathing. There was a pregnant woman among them, naturally, we were worried about her and the baby. But guess what? They all went home later that night. Because of you." She squeezed the ball of his shoulder. "Without you, they would have died in that fire. All of them."

"Tell that Peter," Stiles muttered under his breath.

"He's still the same?" Scott asked, making Stiles wonder how much his mother had told him. But with him coming here regularly to bring his mom dinner, he might have heard a thing or two.

"I was about to visit him," Stiles said which ended with Scott coming with him. Scott tried to go back to their lighthearted conspiracy theories from last night but Stiles' heart wasn't in it.

"We have to have a real sleepover sometime." Scott changed the topic. "And no sneaking out in the middle of the night. I thought you got abducted again when I woke up and you were gone. And what is with the wet towels in the bathroom? What the fuck did you do? Hope you didn't wet your bed."

Stiles needed a moment to piece together what Scott was talking about. Derek had come for him in the middle of the night and as usual, he'd left behind a wet trail. Stiles had mopped up the worst and had left the wet towels in a corner of the bathroom.

"Just water, I swear. I'm just too clumsy to get a drink of water." Stiles even raised his hand for that oath which got him a laugh from Scott.

Talia was not there yet so Stiles just had a quick look at Peter, nothing had changed there, sadly, and then the only thing he could do was to wait. Stiles hated waiting.

However, Scott was a welcomed distraction and he didn't seem to be in a hurry to get home so they settled in the waiting room where Scott told him what was going on at school. The Hale kids hadn't been back to school yet either which didn't help with the rumors. The fire was still the talk of the school. Because of that it almost went unnoticed that one of the substitute teachers hadn't been in since the weekend either.

Stiles could tell him something about that but he didn't. This was still an ongoing investigation and he didn't want to sabotage it by telling details he shouldn't have in the first place. So before they

ventured too deeply into that, Stiles stirred them over to other topics. Turned out that that Scott had treated himself to some new games recently and with that Stiles had an invitation to waste the weekend with video games. He was tempted to go. But that depended on Talia and Peter. Right on cue, Talia came around the corner.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting," Talia interrupted them which was Scott's cue to say goodbye and leave. Stiles almost called him back to stay with him but as much as he would have liked to not face Talia alone, there were things Scott didn't need to know. Why again had he declined John's offer to come with him? Stiles was cursing at himself in his head while he forced a smile on his face.

Getting how uncomfortable she was making him, Talia took a seat not right next to him.

"I got your gifts," Stiles said just to say something. "The car is a bit much but there's no taking it back, it's mine now."

"It's yours," Talia assured him. "I … we owe you so much more."

"I'm fine, thanks." Stiles shifted in his seat.

"You wanted to talk to me?" Talia prompted when Stiles just fiddled with the seam of his jeans without looking at her.

"It's about Peter," he started. "He's not getting better. You said that it could take years for him to recover. If he recovers."

"We have to wait." Talia slumped in on herself. Stiles wondered when she last had a good night's sleep. "He's a fighter."

That was true but Stiles doubted that it was enough.

"There might be another way," he said which got him her full attention. "Derek. He pointed out that you still owe him a member of your pack."

"He wants Peter?" Her eyes flickered over to Peter's room as if she feared that Derek had snatched him in the meantime.

"He's offering to take him," Stiles corrected. "He's sure that Peter will recover with him."

"But he would belong to Derek."

"So do I, it's not that bad." Stiles counted on his scent or whatever she was picking up from him to tell her that he meant it. He liked his life with Derek. "The only thing I don't like about the idea is that we can't ask Peter. Nobody asked me and I can't just alter his life forever like that." He let out a sigh.

Talia leaned back in her seat, absently nibbling on her thumb. Worried sister more than alpha, Stiles guessed.

She hadn't outright said no so Stiles gave her time to think about it. This was probably the hardest decision she would ever have to make. Either way, Peter would have to live with the consequences for the rest of his life.

"There might be a way to ask him," she said after a long moment. "But you won't like it."

"If you say things like that, I'm sure I won't like it."

She was right, he did not like it.

"You're not going to stick your claws in my neck!"

Chapter 64

Chapter Notes

> If you are worried about fire and burning, please check the note at the end before reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fire. It was everywhere. Peter was surrounded by flames, closing in on him. They were licking at his legs and when he tried to shield his face with his arms, liquid fire ate through his flesh, blackening the bone of his forearm. He felt half his face melting off his skull and when he opened his mouth in a scream, the fire burned its way down to his lungs.

Peter screamed.

Blinding pain thrummed through his body while he was burning alive. He heard his skin cracking under the heat and smelled his own scorching flesh. He shouldn't even be alive like this but no matter how much of him the fire ate away, unconsciousness never came.

Vaguely he was aware that it was his house he was trapped in but why it was burning or why it never stopped, he didn't know. There was no time. Just fire and pain and his screams getting lost in the roaring of the fire.

"Peter?"

He thought he'd heard a voice calling his name but it was lost in the fire.

"Peter!" This time his name came through to him. "Peter!"

He wanted to answer but his throat was just a raw mess of burned flesh, he couldn't form words. He tried to take a step towards the voice but his leg buckled and he fell to his knees. He crashed down hard, his left arm gave out under him like crumbling paper. With his other arm, he tried to move forward but he wasn't even sure in which direction to crawl. The flames closed in over his head and all he could see with the smoke burning in his eyes was a wall flames.

"Peter." The voice was closer now and he almost thought that there was a figure behind the flames. He reached for it but his fingers only found shimmering heat that made his skin smolder.

"Peter!" The figure broke through the flames and came to a slithering halt on its knees next to him. Peter couldn't see his face, his eyes were not working properly but he didn't care who it was. Somebody was here, somebody would help him. His chest tightened in a dry sob.

"Shit." The person was hovering next to him while Peter's body got consumed by the fire. "What the fuck am I supposed to do?"

A hand grabbed him by the shoulder and there was a little spark there. As if the contact had put out the fire there. Just a tiny spot.

"Peter!" The person tried to get his attention. "This is not real, it's all in your head. Focus!"

Peter heard the words but the fire was louder, the house was cracking as if it was about to collapse and maybe that was a good thing. Was he still screaming?

"Dammit, Peter." There was a hand on his face now. On the side that hadn't melted off his skull but his skin cracked under the touch nevertheless. But there was another spark. Almost soothing. Somehow Peter lifted his head into the palm.

"Look at me," the person said and when Peter squinted at him, the blurry blob came into focus, becoming just clear enough to recognize his face.

"Stiles," Peter tried to say but the word got stuck in his burned windpipe.

"I'm here. I'm here," Stiles said. He kept his hand firmly pressed to Peter's cheek and with the other one, he swatted away the flames on Peter's back. It didn't do much.

"I can make it stop." Stiles forced him to look at him. "I can get you out of here. But you have to become like me. Do you understand?"

Peter tried to make sense of his words.

"Derek can take you," Stiles yelled over the noises of the house burning around them. "Do you want that?"

Peter wasn't sure what he was talking about but he just latched onto the promise to make the fire stop. Anything to make it stop. He jerked his head in what might be a nod.

"Okay, okay." Stiles' hand tightened around his neck. "Just a little while longer. Trust me. It will be over soon."

The hand on his neck vanished. Stiles was gone. Peter still felt it on his neck, cool and soothing, but a second later that feeling got eaten away by the heat rolling over him. The flames flickered back to life, closing in on him again. Peter curled in on himself, making himself as small as possible.

Stiles was already a distant memory. Peter didn't know if it had been seconds or hours ago. Had Stiles even been here?

Peter was burning alive and he couldn't even scream.

Chapter End Notes

> This chapter contains graphic descriptions of burning alive. In his head Peter is still stuck in the burning house, reliving what has happened to him. You can skip it if you want, we'll get a less graphic recap from Stiles next chapter.

Chapter 65

Stiles did let Talia stick her claws in his neck.

He didn't like it and his initial reaction was "Hell no!" but when Talia explained it to him, that he would be able to enter Peter's mind and ask him directly, he was listening. The idea of entering somebody's mind caused the next big nope reaction because that was just wrong on so many levels but it was the only way they could ask Peter before they made a life-altering decision for him.

Stiles had just spent minutes, convincing Talia that giving Peter to Derek was not a bad thing and now she had to do the same with the werewolf mind-melt thing. The irony was not lost on Stiles.

"Okay, let's do this." Stiles huffed out a breath, steeling himself for what they were about to do.

Of course, they couldn't just march into Peter's sterile room and prick his neck with claws, the nurses around here had something against that kind of thing so Talia first had to go and find one of the pack members working at the hospital who had the authority to allow something like this.

Which left Stiles alone in the waiting area where he was bouncing his leg and getting more anxious by the minute.

It felt like an eternity but eventually, Talia came back. They were doing this.

Talia closed the curtains and Stiles dragged a chair over to Peter's bed while a nurse rolled Peter to his side so that Talia had excess to his neck. As far as Stiles understood, Talia would function as some kind of conductor between them.

"Thank you, Stacy. Could you wait outside?" Talia dismissed the nurse.

Stiles could tell how much this was against her work ethic but on the other hand, Stacy was a member of the Hale pack. She knew that Peter was a werewolf and that there were things beyond what doctors could do.

Stacy left the room but she promised to stay close in case they needed her. Stiles did not want to think about what could possibly go wrong that they would need a nurse in here.

"Relax, I'm not going to hurt you." Talia stepped around him and took her place between Peter's bed and where Stiles was sitting with a white-knuckled grip on the edges of his seat.

"I'm pretty sure that sticking your claws in my neck is going to hurt like hell." Stiles had to breathe against a sudden wave of nausea. It didn't help that Talia was now standing behind him.

"Just do it already." Stiles gritted out and steeled himself for the pain.

It hurt but not as much as Stiles had feared. His whole body locked up and he had just enough time to wonder if he was having a seizure before the room around him disappeared.

It was kind of like when Derek was dragging him through the pipes. But instead of coming out in the lake, where everything was calm and soothing, Stiles found himself surrounded by fire.

He was back in the fire. He wasn't sure but this might very well be the hallway he'd found Peter and Emily in. Fire and smoke filled the air, making it hard to see, so Stiles wasn't sure.

"Peter?" He yelled over the noises of the fire and to his surprise, he found that he could breathe

properly. The air was warm but not the burning heat that had eaten away his nose-hairs when he'd run into the burning house. The smoke didn't burn in his eyes and when he tenderly reached out to test the heat of the flames, he didn't get burned.

"It's not real," Stiles realized. It made sense, this was all in Peter's head.

Turned out that the fire was very real for Peter.

Stiles found him on the floor just like the other day but this time Peter was conscious. More or less.

"Peter!" Stiles fell to his knees next to him.

His left side was just a black mess, bubbling with the tar-like substance that was eating its way through his flesh. Stiles didn't dare to touch it even if he doubted that the wolfsbane or the flames would hurt him but touching him there might hurt Peter even more. But he did put a hand on Peter's right shoulder. He didn't even seem to notice. It looked like he was screaming but it was lost in the roaring of the fire around them.

"Dammit, Peter." With his other hand, Stiles tried to turn Peter's head. "Look at me."

Now Peter seemed to notice him.

Peter gave him what counted as a nod when Stiles told him about Derek's offer but he highly doubted that Peter understood what he was consenting to here. Not that it mattered. Stiles was not going to leave him here to burn alive for what could very well be the next few years. Every minute in this hell was too long.

"Just a little while longer," Stiles promised. "Trust me. It will be over soon."

He didn't want to leave Peter but the sooner he got out of here, the sooner he could get Peter out as well. He did let his fingers linger on Peter's neck for a second longer but then Stiles pushed back.

He jerked awake so hard that he would have toppled over with the chair if it hadn't been for Talia's strong hand supporting his neck.

"We have to get him out of there. Now." Stiles scrambled to his feet and was at Peter's side in a heart-beat. They had rolled him onto his good side so Stiles was looking at the raw flesh of the left side of his face. The white stuff they had put on his wounds concealed the worst but what Stiles could make out was bad enough. It was overlapping with what he'd just seen in Peter's mind. Half his face had melted off his skull with that wolfsbane stuff.

"I'm getting you out of there," Stiles repeated his promise even if he doubted that Peter could hear him. Not over the flames and his own screaming. "Just hang in there for a little while longer."

"What did you see?" Talia spoke up behind him.

"He's stuck in the house." Stiles closed his eyes but that brought the images in his mind to life more vividly. "He's still burning."

It still took some convincing but in the end, Talia agreed to give Peter to Derek.

"It's not that bad." Stiles gave her a weak smile. "He will still be your little brother. And your beta."

But he also would be Derek's. Forever.

Talia's jaw was working, she didn't like it but after what Stiles had seen in Peter's mind, and she

knew that he was telling the truth about that, he couldn't lie to a werewolf, especially not to an alpha, she gave him a grim nod.

"How do we do this?" She asked, a worried eye on Peter. Aside from his horrible wounds, he looked peaceful. His body was relaxed and the good side of his face smooth as if he was sleeping. But Stiles knew that it was only on the outside, whatever they were giving him to keep him in a coma did that. On the inside, Peter was burning in hell. Literally.

"We have to bring him out to the lake," Stiles said, dark memories lurking in the back of his mind. He shut them down with the image of Peter burning alive. This was different. "You have to give him to Derek there."

"He's going to drown him." Talia's voice was shaking.

"Yes," Stiles confirmed. "And let's be honest, that's going to suck. Big time. But compared to what he's going through right now …" He made a helpless gesture over the still form in the bed.

"Stay with him," Talia ordered before she marched out of the room.

Stiles nodded numbly. They were doing this. Peter would join them at the bottom of the lake.

"Derek isn't so bad, you'll see." Stiles tried a smile but it felt more like a grimace.

"Everything alright?" The nurse, Stacy, stood in the door. She seemed unsure of what to do now since Talia had left. This was supposed to be a sterile room, Stiles remembered. Not that it mattered any longer.

"Can we turn him to his back?" Stiles asked. That way the burn wounds wouldn't be right in his face and he would be able to see more of Peter's good side.

Glad for something to do, Stacy stepped closer and with a practiced move, she rolled Peter to his back and checked on his wounds.

"Can she help him?" Stacy asked with a glance in the direction Talia had disappeared in.

"He'll be fine soon," Stiles assured her. "But we'll have to transfer him somewhere else for that. Can I stay with him until Talia comes back?"

Stacy thought about that for a moment. Officially, nobody was allowed in here but the damage was already done. So she agreed but she kept the curtains closed when she left.

Stiles didn't know how much time had passed, at least half an hour, before Talia came back. With Stacy and another nurse who was bringing a gurney.

Stiles wondered who Talia had kicked out of bed, it had to be around midnight by now, to get this arranged but he didn't ask. He just stepped back to let the nurses transfer the too still body over to the gurney and then they were on their way to the elevator. According to Talia, there was an ambulance waiting for them.

Perks of having a large pack, Stiles thought but didn't say out loud. Stacy was pack, he knew that but he was not sure about the other nurse.

The nurses rolled Peter into the back of the waiting ambulance, secured him, and then they left. Stiles wondered what they were thinking about this but he didn't care. He didn't want more people to witness what they were about to do anyway.

Stiles climbed into the back of the ambulance with Talia and then they were sitting shoulder to shoulder in the cramped compartment. It was the most surreal ride of his life. Not just the fact that he was sitting right next to the alpha of the Hale pack but the situation as a whole.

"He always wanted me to get to know you better. You and the pack," Stiles said, eyes firmly on Peter's face. At least they were sitting on his right side. "I bet he didn't think that we would bond over murdering him."

"We're trying to safe his life," Talia said. Stiles didn't have to look at her to know that she was fighting the tears.

"We're doing kind of both." Stiles shifted in his seat. He wanted to bounce his leg but there was not enough room. How long until they arrived at the lake? It felt like they had been on the road for hours already.

The second the car came to a halt, Stiles opened the door and jumped out. He needed to move.

"I can't go farther with the car, we'll have to walk from here." The driver had gotten out of the car as well and only now Stiles realized that it had been Anthony, Emily's father, driving them. For a second Stiles wondered about the logistics behind that but then he was too busy with helping Anthony with getting the gurney out of the car without jostling it too much. Not that it mattered, the narrow path leading to the lake would be way bumpier than this.

"How's Emily doing?" Stiles asked just to fill the silence. Talia had taken over his place at the gurney. With her werewolf strength, she was doing most of the work. The wheels barely touched the ground and the journey was way more smooth for Peter than Stiles had feared.

"She's asking for you," Anthony answered his question. "She wants you to read to her and she wants to play Uno with you and Derek." He threw a glance at Peter. "And she wants Peter to read to her again too. She thinks it's her fault. He shielded her from that grenade."

"When I showed him the Marvel movies, I didn't expect him to pull a Steve Rogers like that," Stiles muttered but he couldn't blame Peter. He would have done the same.

They arrived at the lake in silence, each of them deep in thoughts.

"What now?" Talia stood at the shore, the waterline only a few inches from her feet. She had Peter at her side, an iron grip on the gurney.

Derek hadn't given him instructions and was conveniently absent right now so Stiles went with his gut.

"Make it official," he told Talia.

Talia nodded and straightened up.

"Derek!" She called out over the still lake. "I'm Talia Hale, alpha of the Hale pack. My ancestor promised you a member of his pack but he wronged you. I'm here to pay off his debt."

Chapter 66

Peter was burning. There were flames everywhere. They were eating him alive, melting his clothes, and burning his flesh. Peter screamed but the fire burned it's way down to his lungs, burning him from the inside out.

Around him, the fire roared and the house cracked but there was another sound. Distant at first but it grew louder by the second. It reminded him of big waves, a tsunami maybe, anything that would wash away the flames. But deep down Peter knew that he was trapped here. He was burning and nothing could change that. Stiles had promised to make it stop but that had been wishful thinking. Just like the water to put out the fire.

There was only fire and agony.

But the deep grumbling grew louder.

The wave hit the house. It rolled down the hallway, rolled over the flames, rolled over Peter. It knocked the hot air out of Peter's lungs but there was no air to suck back in. The water closed over his head, taking him with it.

Peter fought. He didn't know which way was up but he wasn't thinking anyway. His lungs were screaming for air but there was only water. Peter felt his scorched flesh rip when he tried to kick his way up to the surface but the pain didn't really register. His body shifted but his claws just hit the water and his fangs found nothing to hold on to. He kicked and thrashed but he was fighting a losing battle. There was only dark water around him and he was seconds from opening his mouth.

"Peter." There were hands on him, dragging him down. On instinct, he fought them, tried to get away from them, but he couldn't shake them off.

His butt hit something solid and in a clear moment, Peter recognized it as the bottom. He tried to push upward but the hands held him back.

"Peter." The voice was in his head. "Let go."

Peter struggled against the hold, eyes turned upward where the surface had to be but there was only darkness surrounding him.

"It's okay," the voice said. "You can let go now."

Peter kept fighting but he was getting weaker. His lungs were close to exploding but he held on for just a moment longer.

In the end, he did open his mouth and let the water in.

The water consumed him and everything faded away. The pain was gone. Peter let go and fell into nothingness.

"Peter?" Somebody was calling his name but Peter didn't want to wake up, not yet. Here nothing hurt, nothing mattered, but out there waited the pain, the fire. He didn't want to go back into the fire, he didn't want to burn any longer.

"Peter." The voice was persistent, dragging him back to consciousness. It was a different voice than before but it took him a moment to connect it to Stiles.

Peter blinked open his eyes. He expected to find himself in Stiles' cabin but it didn't feel like he was lying in the heap of blankets Stiles called a bed and he was not looking up at the familiar ceiling.

He was not in the cabin. Or in any other building.

He found himself floating in the water. Underwater.

"Stop that!" Stiles yelled and yanked him back when he tried to make his way to the surface. "You can't go up there. Not yet. You're still too hurt."

Peter tried to struggle free. Hadn't he been here before? But Stiles was holding him back with ease.

"Would you stop already?" Stiles sounded frustrated but he was still holding him back. Peter kicked again, he needed to get up to the surface, unlike Stiles he needed air, but then he went limp. He was floating at the bottom of the lake but even if his brain was screaming for him to get his ass up to the surface or he would drown, he didn't feel the need to breathe.

Something was very wrong here.

"What happened?" Peter asked and to his surprise, the words came out clear and not like he was talking underwater. He was pretty sure that he'd just taken a breath. He kind of needed that to get out the words but it didn't feel like he needed it for other things. Like staying alive.

Once Stiles was sure that Peter wasn't trying to get away any longer, he let go of him and Peter sank down next to him. It was dark down here but he could still make out Stiles' shape. However, it looked blurred around the edges. As if he was dissolving in the water.

"What do you remember?" Stiles asked. Looked like they were having this conversation at the bottom of the lake. Peter wondered where Derek was but at the moment he was glad that the Nöck wasn't around. He had his suspicions about the situation and he was not sure if he was ready to face Derek.

"We were under attack," Peter recalled. Things were a bit fuzzy but he remembered something crashing through the window. And Emily.

"Is Emily okay?" He asked, dreading the answer. He thought that he'd tried to get her out through the house but smoke and fire had blocked the way. Flames and pain, those he remembered clearly. And then he'd woken up at the bottom of the lake. It didn't take a genius to put two and two together.

"She's fine," Stiles assured him. "You shielded her from the grenade and got her out into the hallway. From there Derek and I took over. We took the expressway to the lake. Had to give her mouth to mouth but she's better now. Already out of the hospital." The proud grin was audible in Stiles' voice.

"And in the meantime Derek took me," Peter concluded. It made sense. Stiles had been busy with Emily and Peter was more than grateful for him to choose the child over him but that meant that Stiles hadn't been able to get Peter out of the water quickly enough. "Guess I'm lucky he didn't just drown me."

"He didn't, not then," Stiles said. "It was a close call, he was about to drown you but I managed to wangle you out of his arms."

"How did I end up here, then?" Peter wondered. He had a look around but the scenery hadn't

changed, he was still sitting with Stiles at the bottom of the lake. And he was not drowning, in fact, he was breathing just fine. So if this wasn't the most lucid dream ever, Peter was pretty sure that Derek had taken him. That he was like Stiles now. Whatever that meant.

"The hunters." Stiles let out a sigh. "They sealed the house with mountain ash and then they set it on fire with grenades. There was wolfsbane napalm in those things. You got a faceful of that. Literally, half your face melted right off your skull. The wolfsbane burned its way down to your bones. Your healing abilities kept you alive but it was not enough to heal you. They had to put you in a coma." Stiles paused with a shaky breath. Peter moved closer and put an arm around his shoulders. Kind of. Stiles didn't feel quite solid and neither did his arm. Weird but Peter put that observation away for later.

"You were suffering and you weren't getting any better," Stiles continued. "Talia said that at that rate it would take years for you to heal. Or your body would just give up."

Peter didn't know what to say. He couldn't even imagine …

"So you asked Derek for help?" Peter guessed. If it had been Stiles in that situation he would have done anything to help him.

"He offered," Stiles corrected. "It was his idea. But I couldn't decide this for you. Nobody asked me and I couldn't do that to you." He shook his head as if that helped to get rid of the bad memories. "Talia did this freakish mind-melt thing so I could ask you."

That triggered a memory.

"You were there." It hadn't been a dream.

Stiles nodded. "I asked you and you said yes but I doubt it counts, you were in agony and I'm not even sure if you understood what I was asking."

"You did the right thing," Peter assured him and hugged him closer. Everything was better than the fire.

They sat in silence for a while, both lost in their own thoughts.

Peter was trying to wrap his head around the fact that he had basically died and belonged to Derek now. Somehow. Stiles had never gone into detail when it came to his relationship with Derek.

"Will I see my pack again?" Peter broke the silence. Was it even his pack any longer? Was Talia still his alpha?

"Of course." Stiles shot upright, throwing off Peter's arm. "Talia is waiting to hear from you. Peter, you're not a prisoner. You can see your family, you can do whatever you want."

"But I can't stay for long." Peter nodded grimly.

"It's not that bad." Stiles settled back and sank into his side. He actually did sink into his side. As if they both were semi-liquid. It was a weird feeling but at the same time, it was comforting.

However, even in this half-liquid state Peter could tell that his body wasn't healed up yet. The left side of his face still felt wrong, tight and rigid, and when he ran a hand over it, it wasn't smooth. His fingertips bumped over ridges and strands of scar tissue. His left arm and the side of his chest didn't feel any better.

He wanted to leave the lake, he wanted to see Talia and the rest of his pack to make sure that they were fine, but when Stiles told him that he needed to stay down here for a little while longer, he believed him. And if he was honest, it was nice here. He could almost forget that there was a surface.

Stiles brought him up to date with what had happened while he'd been unconscious. The whole house had burned down but thanks to Stiles everybody had made it out alive.

"Your library is gone, though," Stiles admitted.

Peter wanted to say something about that, there had been quite some rare books in his collection and it was a shame that they were all gone, but they were interrupted by a presence approaching them.

"That's Derek." Stiles had noticed it too. "He let me go first to break it to you but I think he wants to meet you properly now. See you later."

With that Stiles pushed away and before Peter could react, he was gone. Where to he had no clue. Stiles hadn't just swum away, he'd kind of just vanished. Or rather dissolved, if that made sense.

However, before Peter could figure out what Stiles had just done the presence closed in on him. For a second it was all around him but then it came together and Derek was floating in the water in front of him.

"Peter," he said.

"Derek," Peter greeted him the same way, keeping a wary eye on him. He'd met Derek a few times and he had gotten to know him but on a completely different level. They had been equals then, now Peter belonged to Derek. He had no idea what to do with that information.

"What do you want from me?" Peter asked when Derek just looked at him.

"You're not fully healed yet," Derek observed and Peter fought the urge to cover his scarred face with his hand.

"Stiles says that I have to stay under for a little while longer for that," Peter said to test the waters, so to speak. Would Derek object to him leaving the lake?

"I'm not your enemy," Derek said and came closer.

Peter floated backward to keep the distance. It was scary how quickly he'd gotten comfortable with being underwater.

"What do you want from me?" Peter repeated. He had read quite a lot about water creatures in general and Nöcks in particular lately. He'd read about these creatures keeping people as servants but nowhere the books mentioned what kind of services were expected. Stiles hadn't been helpful there either.

"I won't hurt you," Derek assured him but didn't try to come closer again. "You have to stay here with me but aside from that, you're free to do whatever you want. Just like Stiles."

"I want to see my pack." Peter challenged him and let electric blue bleed into his eyes.

"I won't stop you if you want to go now," Derek said, unimpressed. "But you would be in pain, you should wait a little while longer."

Peter was about to go anyway. He wanted to see Talia, he wanted to see for himself if he was truly allowed to leave the lake but then Derek's form dissolved and suddenly his presence was all around Peter. His first instinct was to fight it but it had something soothing. Only when the pain was gone, Peter realized how much his body had still been aching. Peter's resistance melted away and he let himself sink into Derek.

Chapter 67

When Talia pushed the gurney into the water, Stiles didn't go with Peter. He didn't want to watch him drown. There was no way to help him through that and watching it would only give him nightmares for weeks. So Stiles stood at the shore with Talia and Anthony and watched the gurney slowly sinking into the water. The waterline hadn't quite reached Peter when it came to a halt.

Derek was standing there, a hand on Peter's shoulder but he was looking at Talia.

"Talia Hale, alpha of the Hale pack." He spoke in the same formal manner as Talia. "I accept your sacrifice. The debt of your ancestor is paid."

With that, he picked up Peter's still form and turned around to walk out into the lake with him.

"Don't." Talia reached for them and made a step forward but Stiles held her back. There was no point in her dying as well today.

"It's okay," Stiles assured her while Derek just kept walking. The water was about to close over Peter's head. It would be over soon.

Stiles felt the tension in Talia's body but she didn't try to shake him off to go after her brother. She just watched in silence until Derek's head disappeared in the water. There weren't even bubbles, just an undisturbed surface.

"You sure that was the right move?" Anthony asked, eyes still on the spot where Derek had disappeared with Peter.

"A bit late for that question, isn't it?" Stiles turned on his heel and marched over to his cabin. He did not want to think about what was happening under the surface right now. Peter was most likely fighting for his life. Drowning was not a peaceful death, Hollywood was lying there. Stiles just hoped that it would be over soon.

"I'm going under as well in a minute," Stiles told them. "I want to check on him."

"When will he come back up?" Talia was following him but she kept her eyes on the water as if she expected Peter to emerge any second now.

"Not today." Stiles shook his head. "After an injury like that, I've been under for days."

They entered the cabin and Stiles took a moment to have a look around. This was his but he didn't mind sharing. Peter would need a place to keep his clothes and things like his phone. At least for now. They had time to come up with a long-term solution.

"I can lend him some clothes but it would be a good idea to bring over some stuff he might need," Stiles said. Mainly he wanted to distract Talia, give her something to do, but it would be nice if Peter had his own stuff here when he came back up.

"And my car is kind of still at the hospital," he remembered. "Can I bother you with bringing it here?"

Talia didn't want to leave. She wanted to stay until Peter came topside but in the end, Stiles convinced her to go home and get some rest. In the morning she would bring over some things for Peter, all his belongings had been destroyed in the fire but she would find some basics for him.

And they would bring over Stiles' car.

"Did I make a mistake?" Talia asked. "I let this … this creature take him … drown him … what if …" Her voice broke.

Stiles stepped in front of her, forcing her to look at him.

"This creature has saved Boyd and Erica," he reminded her. "He saved Peter and Emily and believe me, he wanted to kill Peter. Not take him, drown him. You have no idea how strong that urge was but Derek fought it. He did not kill Peter that day." Stiles paused to let his words sink in. "Today is different. This is not Derek giving in to his nature, this is Derek using his nature to save Peter. Is his life going to change drastically? Yes. But he's going to have a life." Hesitantly Stiles reached out and put a hand on her shoulder. "I'll make sure that he calls you first thing when he comes back up. I'm going to make him call you buck-naked, won't even let him put on clothes first."

That got him a smile from Talia. Then she visibly collected herself and straightened up.

"I have to take care of a few things," she said, clearing her throat. "But I want to hear from him soon."

A few minutes later Stiles watched while she and Anthony walked up the path with the empty gurney between them. Once they were out of sight, Stiles stripped down to his boxers and dove into the lake.

Peter hadn't come to yet.

"Was it bad?" Stiles dared to ask. Peter was at the bottom of the lake, just a lifeless body but that would change in a minute.

"He fought," Derek said, his voice an echo in Stiles' head. He was just a presence floating around him and for a second Stiles was tempted to sink into him. But Peter needed him.

"Let me break it to him," Stiles suggested. "He might take it better from me."

Derek agreed easily and backed off for now. They had all the time in the world to get to know each other.

Peter woke up kicking. Stiles remembered when he'd been in his place, when his brain still insisted that he needed to breathe and that he would die if he stayed underwater. So he tried his best to calm Peter down and eventually he listened.

He took it better than expected. For sure better than Stiles back then but Peter had the advantage that he knew Stiles and Derek, he wasn't completely blindsided by this.

Stiles brought him up to date with what was going on on the surface, that his house was gone but that there had been no casualties. Except for Peter, of course. Peter wanted to see for himself but Stiles convinced him to give himself a little more time to heal.

When Derek approached them, Stiles backed off but he stayed close enough to see how Peter would react to the Nöck. In the end, Peter sank into Derek.

Stiles left the lake to give them some privacy but he couldn't help the broad grin on his face when he retreated to his cabin.

Without his car he was kind of stranded here, not that he wanted to leave before Peter was topside

again, so Stiles got comfortable on the bed and got his phone out. He texted John to inform him about Peter and to ask about the investigation. At the moment Derek was busy with Peter but he would come back to the hunters eventually. Derek was no-one to forget easily. If John didn't bring the hunters to justice, Derek would.

Stiles fiddled with his phone for a long minute but then he wrote another message. Talia deserved to know that Peter had gained consciousness and was now with Derek.

I still want to hear it from him, came Talia's answer but Stiles could feel the relief behind those words.

All they could do now was to wait. Stiles got his laptop out to kill some time and to keep his mind from wandering back to Peter. The urge to dive into the lake to check on him was strong but Peter was with Derek for the first time and Stiles didn't want to interrupt that experience.

He must have fallen asleep because when Stiles blinked his eyes open, the morning sun was illuminating the cabin. Stiles rolled to his back with a groan, he'd slept in a weird angle and he was pretty sure that he had imprints from the keyboard on his face.

Peter wasn't there but Stiles didn't expect him to come up before noon, as the earliest. It was quite possible that he wouldn't come up until next week, time was a tricky thing when one was with Derek.

Before he got up to face the day, Stiles checked his phone. He was reading a message from John, they had some promising leads but no arrests yet, when he heard somebody outside.

Thinking that it was somebody from the pack, most likely Talia herself, who was here to bring the stuff for Peter, Stiles opened the door.

"Stiles?" Parrish blinked at him in surprise.

"What are you doing here?" They both said at the same time and then they were both waiting for the other one to answer the question.

I live here, would have been Stiles' answer but he couldn't say that. So he waited for the deputy to speak first.

Parrish tried to peek past Stiles and even if Stiles did his best to use the door as a shield he was pretty sure that Parrish had a good view into the cabin. Not at the kitchen part but where his bed was. An unmade heap of blankets with his laptop and phone on top.

"Did you sleep here?" Parrish asked. "Stiles, what's going on?"

Stiles bit his lip, unsure what to do, but in the end, he opened the door and offered the deputy a coffee. He didn't know what he was going to tell him but he had to give him something.

"Shouldn't you be patrolling the road to keep people from coming out to the lake?" Stiles asked and busied his hands with getting a fire going. He felt Parrish's eyes on his back but he did his best to ignore him.

"At the moment the sheriff has us checking on the Hale family," Parrish answered. "He doesn't want another attack on them."

Stiles hmmed to that and put the kettle on the stove. The water needed time to boil which meant that he'd run out of excuses to face Parrish. With a sigh, Stiles turned around.

"Stiles." Parrish did his best to sound understanding and caring but Stiles knew that it was at least partly a tactic to get him to talk. "Talk to me. Why did you sleep here? If you're not safe with your uncle …"

"Would you just stop?" Stiles shut him up. He didn't care what Parrish might think about him but even suggesting that John …

"You're trying to solve a puzzle, I get that, but you're missing like ninety percent of the pieces." Stiles let out his frustration in a sigh, why couldn't Parrish just back off?

"Give me more pieces, then." Parrish fixed him with a hard gaze. He was on a mission and there was no way to make him back off, Stiles realized. He was like Buttons who was just determined to sink his teeth into Stiles' ankle. And if Parrish looked at Stiles too closely, he could cause some serious problems, especially for John.

Behind him, the kettle whistled with the boiling water and Stiles turned around to make them coffee. Too bad he didn't have alcohol in his cabin, he would have loved to spice his coffee for this conversation.

"What do you know?" He asked, knowing that Parrish would pick up on his defeat.

"I don't know shit." Now it was Parrish who let out a sigh of frustration. "Nothing fits. It's like you said, I'm missing quite a few pieces." He took a breath. "This place for example. Boyd and Erica showed up here after they had been kidnapped, and you still owe me an explanation where you've been at that time, but to get here they must have crossed several roads and passed at least four houses. Why didn't they call for help earlier?" He waited for Stiles to answer the question.

Stiles just handed him his cup of coffee and sat down at the table.

"Then the fire." Parrish accepted the coffee. "Peter and Emily were still in the house and you ran in after them, that's a fact, we have witnesses. But then all three of you are suddenly here, on the other side of the town. And what's with this Derek guy? He's a ghost, I can't find anything on him, it's as if he doesn't exist. He was out here with you when I arrested him. The day of the fire he was at the Hale house and later here again. Who is he? What's his role in this?"

Stiles sipped his coffee and listened to his rambling. Sounded as if Parrish had been mulling over this for a while now.

"And you." Parrish looked directly at him. "You keep popping up at crime scenes. What's your role in this?"

Stiles rolled the cup between his palms.

"You remind me of John, you know that?" Stiles said with a fond smile on his lips. "He couldn't let it go either."

"Stiles, talk to me."

Stiles stalled for a moment longer by taking another sip of his coffee. How was he supposed to explain this?

To give him some time, Parrish took his first sip as well. His face did an interesting thing when the coffee hit his taste-buds, nobody was used to the old-fashioned way of making coffee, but he almost spat it out when suddenly the door opened.

"Didn't know we have a guest," Peter said. He was standing in the door stark naked, dripping wet, and without a shred of shame.

Chapter 68

Peter could get lost in Derek.

Stiles had tried to describe to him how it felt when he was under but that didn't even begin to cover what Peter was feeling when he sank into the presence that was Derek. The Nöck was all around him but at the same time they were interwoven, Peter didn't even know where he ended and Derek began. It felt good. Everything was calm and peaceful down here and it was easy to let go and just drift.

But Peter had people he needed to get back to, they were waiting for him, so he didn't give in to temptation and separated himself from Derek rather sooner than later.

Derek didn't try to hold him back but the closer Peter came to the surface, the more he felt his body. Not only that it became more solid, Peter felt his injuries. When he touched his face it felt smooth but under the healed skin throbbed the pain. Not enough for him to turn around and sink into Derek again but a constant reminder that he'd been burned alive and wasn't fully healed yet.

Peter came out of the water stark naked. Stiles had mentioned that they had brought him here straight from that sterile room at the hospital and apparently burn victims didn't even get hospital gowns. What little he had on his body to cover him up was gone. Peter just hoped that Talia had taken it with her. Stiles had something against littering around the lake, he remembered.

At least this was a remote area so there was nobody to ogle his bare ass when Peter made his way over to the cabin. He picked up two heart-beats, Stiles and Talia was his guess, but when he came closer, he heard an unexpected voice.

"Parrish?" Peter wondered but it became clear why the deputy was here a second later. He had questions and he was cornering Stiles for answers.

Peter looked down at his naked body, there was a puddle forming around his feet, but then he just shrugged and opened the door.

Parrish spat out his coffee and Stiles almost toppled over with his chair, but did not spill his coffee, at the sight of him standing in the door. Peter used the moment of confusion to fetch himself a towel.

"Take some of my clothes for now." Stiles was the first to recover. "Talia is bringing over some stuff for you in a bit."

"Peter Hale?" Parrish stared at him with his mouth hanging open. If due to the being naked part, he was about to change that, the not looking like Freddy Krueger any longer part or just the fact that he was here, Peter didn't know and if he was honest, he didn't care.

"What the hell is going on here?" Parrish found his voice again. "Why are you here? And why are you strolling around naked? Stiles is a teenager, I should arrest you for indecent behavior. This can easily count as sexual harassment as well."

By the time Peter was dressed, there was a mug of coffee waiting for him and Stiles offered him his chair.

Parrish was still waiting for answers but Peter could almost hear the wheels turning in his head. Stiles and Derek had been on the way back to the lake when Parrish had arrested Derek. Back then

Stiles had joked that he should be careful or he would build up a reputation of bringing older men out here for some fun. The paid-for kind of fun.

Peter had come in naked and the bed was unmade, he noticed, way to give the deputy the wrongest ideas.

Peter shared a glance with Stiles but he'd decided to clue Parrish in when he'd walked in on them.

"At least with you around we can prove some things." Stiles finished his coffee with determination. He put the cup in the sink before he turned to Parrish.

"What do you want to hear about first? Werewolves or the local lake monster?"

Peter had not fully grasped what had happened to him yet and what it meant for his future that he was now bound to Derek but seeing Parrish struggle to wrap his head around what Stiles was telling him, distracted him from his own problems for a moment. Nursing his coffee, Peter watched the spectacle and only added some detail here and there when Stiles went over something too quickly, leaving out important parts in his 101 to the supernatural.

Parrish was not believing one word that much was clear but he did change his mind rather quickly when Peter snapped his fangs at him. It took a moment to convince him to give up his new life as a wall ornament, though.

Under the table, Stiles kicked his shin for that stunt but Parrish's face had been worth it.

"Somebody's coming." Peter became serious when he heard somebody outside.

"Seriously?" Stiles let out a groan. "It's getting crowded in here. Why are there suddenly so many people around?"

"It's Talia." Peter recognized his alpha's presence. He tried to not let it show but he breathed in relief at that realization. Talia was still his alpha, he was still part of the Hale pack. Being bound to Derek hadn't changed that. "I'll meet her outside."

With that, he stood and before Stiles or Parrish had a chance to object, he was out of the door.

"Peter!" Talia dropped the two suitcases she'd been carrying and flung herself into his arms like in some cheap romance movie. Not that Peter cared, he hugged her back just as fiercely.

They hugged for a long moment, just holding on to each other. Peter took a deep breath to inhale the scent of his alpha, to reconnect with her, and he felt the hot puffs of her breath on his neck as well.

But then she brought some distance between them to have a proper look at him. Her hands were running over his neck and chest, cupping his now smooth cheek.

"You need a shave," she said with a little laugh.

Peter ran a hand over the left side of his face and had to admit that she was right. His fingertips ran over stubble but what was more concerning was that there were gaps where his beard should be.

"Hope you have a razor in there." Peter nodded towards the suitcases. "I doubt that Stiles has one. Don't think that he even has to shave."

"Are you calling me a baby-face?" Stiles called over to them, so much for some privacy.

"Is that Deputy Parrish?" Talia had spotted the man standing behind Stiles in the doorway. "What's he doing here?"

"Learning about werewolves." Peter let out a sigh. He probably should have stayed at the bottom of the lake for a little while longer to avoid all this. "It was either that or getting arrested for … what was it, Deputy? Indecent behavior? Sexual harassment?"

Parrish tried to hide behind Stiles when he suddenly found himself as the center of attention.

"That and he had the suspicion that I was running some kind of sex worker dig in my cabin." Stiles was not helping.

"I did not."

"He just learned that you're the alpha, dear sister, so be gentle with him. John thinks highly of him."

Peter picked up the suitcases and then he followed Talia back into the cabin where she introduced herself properly to the Deputy.

Parrish didn't seem to know what to do with the alpha in front of him but all in all, he took it better than expected.

However, it came as a relief, when a message came through his radio that he was needed elsewhere.

He almost fled the cabin but Peter had the feeling that they had gained an alley today. Once Parrish had comprehended what he'd learned over the last hour.

"So, that was that." Stiles closed the door and turned to Peter. "What about you? How do you feel? Getting along with Derek? Because if not, that would be a real bummer."

"Derek …," Peter started with a glance at Talia. "He's not what I expected. Not that I expected to wake up in the lake."

"I'm sorry." Talia reached for him. "It was the only thing we could do. You were suffering and there was nothing else we could do to help you."

"I know." Peter took a breath. He hadn't meant to upset her. Her guilt was clogging his nose. "It's okay. So far it doesn't seem too bad. I'm immortal now." He gave her a feral grin to which she slapped his shoulder. At least she had picked his right shoulder so it didn't hurt too badly. His body was still aching but it was only a matter of time now until he was fully healed. With Derek's help, it would be even quicker than usual. Not that Peter wanted to return to him just yet.

"Do you want to come with me?" Talia asked, hesitation in her voice. "The others are dying to see you."

In sync, they looked over to Stiles who raised his hands.

"Don't mind me," he hurried to say. "I know how much you want to see your pack. Besides, I wanted to check in with John anyway. I hope you brought my car?"

With that, they went separate ways. Stiles drove off in his jeep and Peter climbed into the car with Talia. But she didn't start the car immediately.

"I didn't know what to do," she admitted. Here it was just the two of them, they could speak freely now. "I didn't want you to die and for sure I didn't want to give you to Derek but …"

Peter got it. He would have done the same.

"I'm here," Peter assured her. "You know me, I'm an opportunist, I'm going to make the best out of this."

"But Derek … he owns you."

"So do you," Peter reminded her. She was the alpha, he was her beta. "Hope you won't fight over custody."

She huffed out a laugh but started the car.

Since the house was gone, a thing Peter needed to see for himself at some point, the core members of the pack were crashing with whoever of the pack had a guestroom to spare. Talia and Cora were staying with Nancy so that was where they were heading.

Which was fine with Peter, he wanted a shower and then Nancy could give him a heads-up on what was going on at the station. He wanted to see John as well but since he wasn't sure how much time he had before Derek would drag him back to the lake, he put that to the bottom of his to-do list.

The house was empty when they arrived. Nancy was at work and Cora was out as well.

"Not alone, I hope." Peter raised an eyebrow at that information. There were still hunters out there.

"She should be with Erica."

"Should?"

Talia had let them into the house but now she stopped, her shoulders hanging.

"This whole thing has gotten to her the most." She shook her head. "I don't know, she's distant. I can barely reach her. She's not eating and she hides in her room most of the time."

"I can talk to her," Peter offered. They were kind of close and Cora had opened up to him about having a girlfriend and things like that.

"I would appreciate it."

Peter went to take a much-needed shower and since he hadn't thought ahead and had left all his stuff at the cabin, he put Stiles' clothes back on. Not that he minded Stiles' scent mixed with his. He and Stiles needed some time alone soon to properly mix their scents but first, he wanted to see his pack. Which had gathered in the living room while he'd been in the shower.

A minute later Stiles' scent on him had been replaced with the scent of his pack, everybody wanted to touch him and he hadn't been hugged this much in his life. His face was aching from constant grinning.

That Talia had sacrificed him to Derek was kind of a sore topic but Peter glossed over it by asking about what he'd missed. Turned out that Stiles had only given him the cliff-notes, he had not mentioned that he'd rammed his car into the door.

Cora came in late and then she stood in the door for a long minute without saying anything. When

Pamela gestured for her to join them, she shook her head and backed off. A second later a door slammed shut upstairs.

"I'll talk to her," Peter offered and followed her to the guestroom.

Chapter 69

"Cora?" Peter knocked at the door but for a long second, there was no answer. "Can I come in?"

Her muffled *yes* got almost lost in the noises of the people downstairs. With him returning from the dead, there was a lot to talk about but Peter didn't strain his ears to catch what they had to say about him. Or Derek.

"Hey." Peter stepped into the room Cora was sharing with her mother. They had been living here for a few days now, their scent had settled in but otherwise, the room felt impersonal. There were no personal items, just some clothes and basics like a hairbrush on the nightstand.

Right, they were living from donations, everything they had owned had been lost in the fire.

Cora was sitting on the other side of the double bed, her back to him.

"How are you doing?" Peter asked while he walked around the bed. He sat down next to her.

"Fine." She gave him a clipped answer without looking at him.

"Your mom said that you're not doing so fine," Peter said. "That this whole thing has gotten to you."

"I'm sorry." Her voice broke and she sounded close to tears. "I … didn't know. I didn't want …"

"Hey," Peter repeated and put an arm around her shoulders. She was stiff and rigid but she didn't throw him off. "You were trapped in a burning house, you thought that you would die."

Peter paused, wondering what kind of nightmares were waiting for him. He didn't have time to process what had happened and with Derek things like that didn't matter. Derek had been right when he'd said that there were no nightmares with him.

"We all could have died," Peter continued. "That we made it out alive doesn't mean that we're unscratched. You're not alone."

"You didn't make it out alive." She pointed out. "Not really. And now you have to stay with Derek. Forever."

"I'm here now." Peter hugged her closer and this time she gave in, just a little bit. "Being with Derek also means that I'm basically immortal. They can't harm me any longer. Those hunters won't know what hit them." His feral grin had a hint of too much teeth, he felt his gums itch with the need to drop fangs.

He had been determined to find those hunters before. For kidnapping the kids and to get rid of a threat in general. Now he had to avenge his own death. They would not get away with this.

He needed to check in with John to get up to date with the investigation, though.

"Are you going to kill them?" Cora asked in a small voice. "Derek said that if the sheriff can't catch them, he will go after them. He wants to kill them. Everybody responsible."

That was new to Peter. Derek didn't like to kill, Stiles had stressed that point and he'd shut him down when Peter had suggested siccing Derek on the hunters. Why Derek was willing to make an exception now Peter didn't know but he would take it.

"Not sure yet," Peter admitted. "But with John, Derek, and me on their asses, there is no place in the world where they can hide." According to Stiles Derek only needed a name to find a person and if John hadn't been twiddling his thumbs while Peter had been out of commission, he should have those by now. Stiles had mentioned that he'd even made an arrest.

"That's good," Cora said but sagged into herself. A wave of mixed emotions hit Peter's nose, looked like revenge was not the thing that would help her through this. Which was probably for the better, it was not a good coping mechanism, Peter knew that. But he would go down that path anyway. Kate Argent and her goons had attacked his family, his pack. She had hit them where it hurt the most, at the house, their den. They were supposed to be safe there and it had almost become their grave.

"I want to be alone for a while."

"Okay." Peter stood. "You can talk to me, you know that, right?"

She nodded to that, eyes fixed on the floor.

When he'd come here, Peter had been confident that he would get through to her, they had bonded before, but now he got the feeling that he'd somehow pushed her away even farther.

With mixed feelings, he left the room. Downstairs Talia gave him a questioning look to which he could only shake his head.

"She needs time," he said. "The last few days have been a bit much. For all of us." He had a look around. Most of his pack was here and he could see in their faces what they had been through. While he'd been sleeping in a hospital bed. Part of what they had been through was the fact that he'd been in a hospital bed but he didn't want to think about that.

While he had been upstairs, Pamela had put the pack to work in the kitchen. According to her, Peter needed some real food and not that stuff they had pumped directly into his veins to keep him alive while he'd been in a coma.

Nancy's table was not big enough for this many people but most of them were fine with eating their sandwich standing. Peter got a chair, Pamela insisted, and he ate with Emily tucked into his side. It almost felt like a chaotic meal in their kitchen at home. He was no longer the center of attention, people were talking in little groups. What to do with the house and insurance stuff came up along with what they needed to replace first. At one point or the other, though, every conversation circled back to Peter and his current situation. They were worried about him and of course, they wanted to know how it was, staying at the bottom of the lake with Derek. Peter glossed over that with a snarky comment, which just added to their suspicion but the feeling of being with Derek was hard to describe and way too personal for Peter to share.

"We need to meet Derek now, you know that, right?" Walter spoke up. "Since he's kind of family now."

"Not sure if I would put it like that." Peter did not want to think of Derek as family. His relation with the lake creature was not like that. Peter could not deny the feeling that he was a prisoner, on a long leash but a prisoner nevertheless. However, Derek was Stiles' family. Did that make him some kind of in-law?

His family met Derek sooner than expected because not even ten minutes later, Derek stood in the door to the kitchen.

"Peter," he said, ignoring the rest of the pack in the living room. Everybody was instantly on their feet, the humans backing off and the werewolves at Peter's side with Talia right in front of him, placing herself between Peter and Derek.

"I swear, we're usually not that hostile," Peter said but couldn't help the proud feeling at the sight of his pack, trying to protect him. But like Stiles would say, resistance was futile. Derek was here to bring him back to the lake and there was nothing he could do about that.

"It's okay." Peter put a hand on Talia's shoulder to calm her down. "You knew this would happen."

When Talia loosened her stand, the rest of the pack let their guard down as well but Michael and Isaac didn't leave Peter's side. Isaac most likely just wanted a first-row seat for what was about to happen but Peter still appreciated the gesture.

"You might have guessed it, this Derek," Peter introduced him to his pack.

"He really doesn't have tentacles," Emily piped up from behind her mother. "Is he going to take you with him? Are you going through the pipes? Can I see?"

Peter did not know how he felt about the idea of going through the pipes with Derek, and for sure he didn't want the whole pack to watch, but he didn't even have a car so he couldn't offer to drive them back to the lake. A car was another thing on his never-ending list of things he needed to replace.

"Yes, but you're not going to watch." Peter gave her a stern look but after a second he included the whole pack. He loved them and they had been ready to fight Derek for him but he did not want this to become some kind of freak show. "We're using the bathroom."

At least that room had a door he could close in their faces.

Emily pouted at that but Derek took it as his cue to move. For a second it looked as if Talia wanted to block his way but then she let him pass.

"I'm not taking him away," Derek said, meeting her eyes. "His body isn't fully healed yet, that's why he couldn't stay for long."

Peter didn't like to admit it but Derek was right. He was feeling better by the minute but he was still healing slower than he was used to. There was still a deep ache in his bones.

"I'll see you soon," Peter promised and with that, he followed Derek to the bathroom. Before somebody else could say something, he shut the door.

"What now?" Peter asked, an uneasy feeling in his stomach. He had witnessed Derek taking Stiles with him but actually doing this?

"It doesn't hurt," Derek said and put a hand on his shoulder.

It was over in a second. Just a pull in his guts and the feeling of speed and then he was back in the lake. On instinct, Peter held his breath and tried to swim to the surface but Derek held him back.

"Relax," Derek said and to his surprise, Peter did just that. A second later he sank into Derek. It was still a weird feeling.

"I could get used to this," Peter admitted. The deep ache in his bones was gone and he felt his mind calming down.

"As if you have any other choice," Stiles spoke up next to him.

Peter raised an eyebrow at him but when Stiles snuggled into his side, literally, they were kind of semi-liquid again, he lifted his arm to draw him in even closer.

Peter didn't know how much time had passed, he finally understood what Stiles meant when he said that it was hard to keep track of time when he was with Derek, but when Stiles rose and tugged at his arm, Peter went with him.

Peter came out of the lake dripping wet but since he was still wearing Stiles' clothes, he didn't care that much. At the cabin, they got dressed and Stiles made them coffee. Then they were sitting at the small table with steaming mugs in front of them and a heavy silence hanging over them.

"I'm sorry." Stiles was the first to speak. "I never wanted this for you."

Peter stretched out his legs and leaned back with a sigh. He didn't have the time to think about his situation, he didn't know what it meant long-term.

"Beats being in a coma," he said. He didn't remember much about that time but there had been fire and pain.

"Still." Stiles didn't look him in the eye. "If you're mad at me, I'd understand. And if you want to break up with me, I would understand that too. Would be awkward as hell but I would understand."

"I'm not mad." Peter studied the heavy beams holding up the ceiling. This was Stiles' cabin, he was a gust here. "And I'm not breaking up with you but …" Just to make Stiles squirm he didn't finish the sentence.

"But …?" Stiles prompted quickly, making Peter smile.

"If I'm stuck here at the lake, I want a place of my own. With a shower and an electric stove."

"Decadent much?" Stiles gave him a look but the smell of anxiety clouding him eased off.

"I have my standards."

"Now I'm picturing a mansion." Stiles got a dreamy face. "Make sure to add a new pier, the old one is barely holding it together."

Talia had told him about the plans she had with the burned-down house. That she wanted to rebuild it. That was going to be a mansion.

Peter would always have a room there, he would always be part of the pack. He didn't want anything like that here. A big but empty house would just be depressing. But a cozy little cabin with some modern luxury? He could get behind that. Besides, it would be a shame to ruin the scenery.

"We'll see." Peter sat up straight again. "First I want to find those hunters."

Chapter 70

Peter wanted to check in with John to find out what he had on the hunters so after they finished their coffee, they walked out to where Stiles had parked his car.

"I need my car here as well," Peter said when they reached Stiles' new jeep.

"I think it survived the fire." Stiles tried to remember if Peter's car was one of the unlucky ones that had been damaged but he didn't think so. Where it was now, he didn't know either. Then another thought occurred to him, making him grin.

"Do you take bets on how often I have to drive you back to your car because you forgot the time and Derek had to come and get you?"

It got him a glare from Peter.

"How long do I have?" Peter asked once they were on the road. "Until Derek comes for me?"

"It's not an exact science," Stiles admitted. They had talked about this before but back then it had been more of academic interest for Peter. Stiles had been the bug under the microscope Peter wanted to understand. Now it had turned into something that was defining Peter's life.

"You were not fully healed, that shortens the time you have." Stiles chewed on his bottom lip, trying to find the right words to explain to Peter what was just natural for him. "The longer you stay with Derek beforehand, the longer you can stay away from him. I think I can stay away longer now than in the beginning. Not sure about that one, the first years were kind of a mess and I didn't really keep track of time."

Peter filed that information away with a thoughtful nod.

They had just passed the Beacon Hills welcome sign when Peter told him to change directions. Instead of driving straight to the station, he wanted to have a look at the house first.

Stiles didn't comment on it and just changed directions.

"Pamela is already planning her gardening for next year," Stiles said when the silence between them became too heavy. Peter was deep in thoughts, looking out of the window, and just hmmed to that.

At the house, Stiles parked the car but let Peter get out first. Through the window, he watched him as he walked up to the burned shell of his home.

Stiles couldn't see his face but Peter stood there, rigid and with his fists at his side. If Stiles was not mistaken, there was blood dripping out of his clenched fists.

Stiles sighed and got out of the car as well.

It was not the house, not only the house. It had been Peter's home for all his life, his den, his safe place he could always come back to. It was the place Peter had sworn to keep safe. It was not about the house, that was just a symbol. It was about the people who lived here. His pack.

"The Hales have rebuild before." Stiles stepped up behind Peter, his fingers twitching with the urge to touch him and after a second of hesitation, he put his hand on Peter's shoulder. "They are all safe

and sound. Even Emily, she has you to thank for that."

"Heard it was more you," Peter said. "And Derek.

"You pulled a Steve Rogers and saved her from the grenade," Stiles reminded him. "Even burned half to death you dragged her out into the hallway. I wouldn't have found you in time if you hadn't made it that far."

"Still." Stiles heard him swallow thickly. "You saved us. All of us. Thank you."

"Talia was bad enough with her thank you speech," Stiles muttered but gave Peter's shoulder a squeeze to show him that they were good. "Besides, you paid a high price."

Peter didn't say anything to that and when he stepped forward to have a closer look at the house, Stiles stayed back to give him some privacy.

Peter even ducked under the yellow tape blocking the busted front door and disappeared inside. He didn't come back out for long minutes, long enough for Stiles to wonder if he should go after him. When he did come back out, he had a few books in his hands.

"A few might be salvageable," he said with a thoughtful look at the books. Stiles had his doubts, the four books were water-damaged and at least one had been touched by the fire but Stiles was not an expert on this so he kept his mouth shut.

"At least now I have all the time in the world to build up a new collection," Peter said with bitterness in his voice.

They stored the books in the jeep for now and then Stiles drove them over to the station. During the ride, Peter stayed quiet and for once Stiles didn't push to get a conversation going.

Derek's mugshot was gone.

"Looks like Parrish has given up on that wild goose chase," Stiles commented with a grin. Since they were here, they should check up on the deputy as well. By now he had time to sleep over it, he was either freaking out right now or bursting with questions.

"Peter." John stopped on his way back to his office, a fresh cup of coffee in his hand. "You look good."

This was not the kind of conversation they wanted to have out here so John made an inviting gesture towards his office.

"Coffee?" He asked, raising his mug.

"We're set, thank you." Peter declined politely while Stiles opened his mouth to tell him exactly how not drinkable the stuff here at the station was. They should have gotten some on the way.

"Cut it out." John shut him down before he could even start with his rant. "I know the roast you brew on that ancient stove of yours. This …" He set his mug on the table. "… is at least not giving me ulcers."

"You're not insulting my coffee." Stiles took a seat in a huff and crossed his arms over his chest.

"I heard you have somebody in custody." Peter interrupted before the banter could get out of hand. "And that Chris Argent is cooperating with you? How did you get him to even talk to you?"

"That one." John pointed at Stiles. "Threatened to unleash Derek on Chris and his whole family, his daughter in France included."

The look Peter was giving him now was pure lust and Stiles had no doubt that Peter would kiss him if they weren't sitting in front of the sheriff right now. Blushing Stiles sank deeper into his seat.

"You two." John let out a long-suffering groan.

"Anyway." Peter tore his eyes off Stiles. "What did I miss?"

Half an hour later John's desk was full with files, the mugshots of every hunter they knew of on top of the respective file. While Stiles and Peter had been under, John and the whole department had been busy. They had names and faces of the suspects and were currently busy with digging up everything that was to find about them. They were going through phone calls and bank accounts, talking to known friends and accomplices. Their faces had been all over the news and the phone was constantly ringing with people reporting in on them. Most of those calls turned out to be not helpful but it had become clear how well-liked the Hales were, everybody wanted to help.

Forensics had turned in the first results as well but so far that hadn't gotten them anywhere.

"Honestly?" John sat back in his chair. "I think they're long gone. We're doing the groundwork here, gathering as much evidence and leads as we can but I'm waiting for the FBI to take over any second now."

"You think they will catch them?" Peter mimicked his position.

"Beacon Hills is a small town but this has made some big news." John made a face. "They won't get away with this."

"Heard Derek will come after them if you can't bring them to justice."

"Don't know why he's suddenly so eager to go after somebody and I don't like it," Stiles said. He hadn't seen this side of Derek ever before and he didn't like it. He was not against the killing per se, he was more worried about what it would do to Derek afterward. He'd never liked to kill and every time he had been forced to drown somebody, he'd been withdrawn for weeks.

This time, however, it was not his nature. This time Derek wanted to kill these hunters out of his own free will but Stiles was still worried about how that would affect him.

"I could ask Derek to take me with him," Peter suggested, showing a hint of canine. "He wouldn't have to get his hands dirty."

Stiles had to admit that he kind of liked the idea. He wasn't worried about Peter's consciousness. They had met over a dead body after all.

"You can't just say stuff like that," John hissed. "I'm still the sheriff."

"I'll make sure to do it outside your jurisdiction."

Stiles couldn't help a chuckle while John just glared at the two of them.

They had avoided that topic but now John brought up the possibility that Kate had used somebody from the pack to gain information.

"We think inner core," Stiles cringed when he said it. "You probably want to have a look at the men in the house. My best guess is Isaac, she could have gotten to him at school."

Peter didn't like that thought, that much was obvious, but Stiles could tell that the wheels were already turning in his head.

They were interrupted by Parrish.

"I don't want to bother …," the deputy said sheepishly, eyes everywhere but Stiles and Peter.

"Parrish, come in." John gave Peter a stern look before his attention was on the deputy. "What can I do for you?"

The deputy made sure to close the door properly before he stepped forward.

"I was thinking about what you told me yesterday." He glanced over to Stiles but still avoided Peter. Stiles got the feeling that this was more than just the fact that Peter was a werewolf.

"You and Cora, are you together?" Parrish asked to which Stiles just wanted to punch Peter for starting that stupid rumor.

"No," Stiles said louder than intended. "We are not together. We never have been together and we never will be together. It's just a stupid rumor Peter started that refuses to die. We are not together!"

"So Peter did not put you in Cora's class to seduce her?" Now Parrish looked very uncomfortable.

"I beg your pardon?" Peter asked while Stiles was still trying to make sense out of what Parrish had just said.

"Why would I seduce Cora?" Stiles asked. "Why would Peter want somebody to seduce his own niece? What the fuck? He put me in Cora's class to keep an eye on her. To keep her safe. And to have an eye on Kate Argent, of course."

"Why are you asking this?" John asked calmly.

"Well …" Parrish shifted from one foot to the other. "When Stiles and the others were abducted, I interviewed his teachers. One of them, Mr. Harris …"

"That guy hates me," Stiles interrupted. "Don't believe a word he says about me."

"Yeah, he hasn't spoken too kindly of you." Parrish smiled but sobered up instantly. "Anyway, he and Kate Argent got along quite well. She appreciated his work and was interested in chemistry. Harris was very pleased that he found somebody who would listen to his explanations."

"Now that email makes sense." Peter nodded in realization. "He told her how to make those grenades."

Stiles had no idea what email he was talking about but he was pretty sure that his chemistry teacher had just earned himself a spot on Peter's hit list.

"That's the working theory, yes," John confirmed.

"What has that to do with me seducing Cora?" Stiles brought them back to the main topic.

"Kate complained about you. A lot," Parrish continued. "That you're chasing after Cora, that you

just want to get into her pants. According to Kate, you're not good enough for her, that you're trying to cut her off from her friends, things like that." Parrish cleared his throat. "Back then I thought it was just teenage drama but now …" He made a helpless gesture. "Kate knew that Cora is a … werewolf." He still hesitated at the word, it was kind of adorable. "She has most likely become a teacher because of that. So why was she so obsessed with that? Why did she care so much about Cora's affairs?"

Next to Stiles Peter had half-risen out of his seat, his face pale.

"I'm so stupid."

Chapter 71

Peter had been so stupid. How could he have been so blind?

Kate Argent was Cora's girlfriend.

How could he have not seen it? It was so obvious. That's why Kate had taken over Cora's class. She'd wanted to seduce Cora and it looked like she had succeeded. Chris had suspected it but they all had been looking in the wrong direction. They had been looking at the men of the pack in search for the one Kate had used to gain intel on them. Peter had learned about that only minutes ago but he still hadn't put two and two together. And he'd known about Cora's mysterious girlfriend.

Peter bolted out of John's office, shouldering his way past Parrish.

"Nancy!"

She was in the middle of a phone call and he had to restrain himself to not rip the phone out of her hand.

"Is Cora still at your place?"

Nancy covered the mouthpiece with her hand but her angry look melted away when she saw his face.

"I think so. She spends most of her time in her room. Why?"

Peter didn't bother with an explanation and ran out of the building. Only then he remembered that he didn't have a car with him.

"Stiles! I need your car." The others had followed him, bombarding him with questions but he didn't have time for that. Kate had used Cora. And now Cora was beating herself up over it.

He remembered her small voice when she'd asked if he would kill everybody involved in the fire. Did she expect him to kill her?

Peter ripped the keys out of Stiles' hand and Stiles just barely managed to get into the car with him before he was speeding out of the parking lot.

"Where are we going?" Stiles asked, holding on to the dashboard.

"Cora." Peter laid on the horn when the car in front of him didn't go fast enough for his liking. He knew that this was stupid and unnecessarily dangerous. Cora had been living with her guilt for days a few minutes didn't matter but the wolf part of his nature couldn't help it. He needed to see her. Now.

"Peter, slow down. You're going to kill us."

"We can hardly die," Peter reminded him but slowed down a bit.

"Others can." Stiles had a point there. "What's going on with Cora?"

"She's the one Kate used to get to the pack." Peter felt his fangs pricking his gums at the thought alone. His white-knuckled grip on the steering wheel had some additional claws to it as well and he

knew that his eyes were glowing blue. Lucky them, they were going too fast for anybody to get a good look at him.

"That's just gross." Stiles made an unpleased noise. "Shouldn't she be smarter than that?"

"She's a teenager," Peter said. "And Kate had months to gain her trust." He gritted his teeth. This was his fault, at least partly. When Cora had found out about him and Stiles, she'd been disgusted. She had pointed out how creepy it was for an adult man to be with a teenager. It wasn't like that with Stiles but Cora hadn't known. And Peter had insisted that it was okay. Had she seen him with Stiles and had thought that it was the same with Kate?

Peter brought the car to a halt in front of Nancy's house. Even from the street, he could tell that nobody was home but he let himself in and sprinted up the stairs nevertheless.

The room was as impersonal as before, only some clothes on the unmade bed indicated that somebody was actually living here.

"Call her?" Stiles had followed him and was now taking in the room from where he was standing in the door. Even if this was just temporary, he had the sense to not just enter the bedroom of an alpha. Peter would have appreciated it more if he weren't busy with other things.

"Do you have her number?" Peter asked. "Talia got me a new phone but I'm still missing a few numbers."

Since he was here, he wanted to have at least a quick look around. The nightstand was his best bet to find something personal. Not that he expected to find much. Most personal things had been destroyed in the fire.

Peter's stomach dropped when he found an envelope with his name on it.

"Found anything?" Stiles looked up from his phone.

Peter didn't answer. He had to sit down and for a long second, he didn't dare to open the envelope.

Inside was a single sheet of paper.

"What is it?" Now Stiles did come into the room. Not that Peter cared.

He was reading Cora's suicide note.

It was only a few lines in her neat handwriting and she didn't outright say that she wanted to kill herself but she was saying that she was sorry, that it was all her fault, and she ended with that she intended to make it right again. Especially the last bit could mean anything but it had a final vibe to it.

Without a word, Peter handed the letter to Stiles to read for himself. Meanwhile, his mind was racing. Where did she go? Where was she now? Was it too late already?

"Give me your phone." Peter snatched the phone out of Stiles' hand. Cora's name was already on the display so he just hit call. It went straight to voicemail. "Fuck!"

Next, he called Talia.

"Do you know where Cora is?" Peter asked the second she answered.

"Peter?" He must have confused her by using Stiles' phone but he didn't have time to explain.

"Where's Cora? I need to find her. Now."

Talia assumed that she was at Nancy's which she obviously wasn't.

"Call the whole pack, we need to find her," Peter ordered. "She might do something stupid."

Of course, Talia had questions but she agreed to mobilize the pack first.

"We should call John as well." Stiles took his phone back and scrolled through his contacts. Peter barely listened when Stiles informed the sheriff that they had found a possible suicide note but no Cora.

Stiles ended the call and then he just stood there, thinking.

"Assuming that she wants to do something stupid." Stiles used Peter's own words. "How would she do that? If it's not an instant death, werewolves are hard to kill."

That was what Peter had been thinking about as well. If he knew how she wanted to do it, he might know where she went.

"Make it right," Peter read the words again. What did she mean by that? She couldn't unburn the house.

"You think she knows where Kate is?" Stiles asked.

"I doubt it." Peter shook his head. "She didn't expect Cora to survive and she knows that she's busted now."

Stiles hmmed to that.

Every fiber of Peter's body ached with the need to move, to run, but he wouldn't save Cora if he ran around like a headless chicken.

"Maybe she means you," Stiles mused. "She left the letter for you and not her mother."

Which just confirmed that it was Peter's fault.

"You're the one who has suffered the most from this," Stiles continued.

Peter had been burned the worst, bad enough to put him in a coma. It had been so bad that his sister had agreed to sacrifice him to Derek as a last resort. It had saved his life, sort of, but now he was bound to Derek for eternity. A fact he still hadn't quite comprehended.

"I know where she is," Peter realized. There was only one place where she could attempt to make it right again. He doubted that it worked that way but he could follow Cora's train of thought. "We have to get back to the lake."

For once he wished they could take the expressway through the pipes. Which would have the bonus that it would keep Derek busy but no such luck.

Stiles followed him out to the car and then Peter was flooring it.

"Derek won't take her and give you back." Stiles had caught up. "You're his, nothing is going to change that."

Derek had said something similar before and Peter believed him. Not that he wanted Cora to take

his place.

"If she goes into the water, what will he do?" Peter drove faster than before but this time Stiles wasn't complaining. "Will he take her or just drown her?"

"Drown her," Stiles said darkly. "He doesn't just take people like that. I'm still not sure why he wanted you, don't get me wrong I take it and I'm glad he did but I have no clue why."

Peter let out a growl and put his foot down.

He brought the car to a halt as far up the path as possible and ran the rest of the way. Stiles was somewhere behind him, there was no way he could keep up with the speed of a werewolf.

"Cora!" Peter yelled when he spotted a figure standing out on the pier.

She flinched and for a second he was sure that she would fall into the water with that but she caught herself.

"Cora," Peter said in a lower voice, he didn't want to spook her. "Please come here. Don't do that."

She kept her back to him and didn't move from the edge.

"It's my fault," she said. She had been crying, her voice was still raspy. "It's all my fault. I should have died. Don't say I shouldn't. You said that you'll kill everybody responsible. So did Derek. I am responsible, I deserve to die."

"I know about Kate." Peter stopped at the beginning of the pier. He didn't dare to put his weight on it. Stiles had been right, it was rotten and barely holding it together. Some planks were gone entirely. "It's her fault. She used you."

"You told me to stay away from her." Cora was shaking with her arms slung around her torso. She didn't look as if she was about to jump into the lake any second now but Peter would breathe easier once she was back on dry land.

"I didn't listen. I thought I knew better. I thought she loved me." The last bit came out barely a whisper.

"You loved her," Peter said. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Stiles coming out of the woods. He gestured for him to stay back but his focus stayed on Cora. "You had your doubts, I realize that now, but then you saw me and Stiles and that gave you the impression that it was okay. It is flattering if someone older than you shows interest in you. She was charming and understanding and you fell in love." Peter paused, watching Cora's reaction closely. She hadn't moved but her shoulders had sagged and he had the feeling that she was listening.

"You didn't know," he continued. "She told you that she wasn't in the family business any longer and you believed her. You didn't know what she was planning."

"I should have listened to you." Cora was shaking with sobs. "You told me she's dangerous but I didn't believe you. I believed her. It's all my fault. I told her about dinner with Stiles, I told her that we would all be home that evening."

"You didn't set the house on fire," Peter reminded her. "You are not responsible for her actions. She used you, you're not the perpetrator here, you're a victim. It's not your fault. I'm blaming her, I want her dead now more than ever but not you."

A bit down to his left, Stiles waded into the water and a second later he disappeared under the surface. Peter didn't know what he was planning, if he wanted to distract Derek or be ready to catch Cora but with any luck, they wouldn't have to rely on either.

"Please, come here." Peter tried again. "We can talk more comfortably in Stiles' cabin."

This time he seemed to get through to her. She nodded and wiped her face with the heel of her hand before she turned around and made a step towards the shore. She set her feet carefully, testing the planks before she dared to put weight on them. Peter held his breath while she slowly made her way over to him.

One plank did give under her foot. She struggled to keep her balance but the rotten wood just crumbled under her weight.

With a scream, Cora fell into the water.

Chapter 72

Peter didn't hesitate. The second he saw Cora fall, he sprinted down the rotten pier and dove into the lake.

Cora was flailing in surprise but she came back to the surface quickly. She grabbed one of the beams supporting the pier to climb out of the water and Peter was right behind her, ready to throw her up to the pier if he had to.

Derek was quicker.

Peter didn't see him coming, he was everywhere and nowhere, more a feeling than anything else, but then a hand closed around Cora's ankle. She'd almost made it out of the water, her foot the only part of her body still under the surface but that was enough for Derek.

Cora tried to hold on to the beam when Derek yanked at her leg but the wood crumbled under her claws and she fell back into the water.

She was under again.

Peter went after them but Derek was fast. He was dragging Cora deeper into the lake. Peter only got a glimpse of her face, big eyes and bubbles escaping her mouth with a scream, before she disappeared into the darkness below.

Peter didn't notice the shift, it was just that his strokes became more powerful with the added muscles, but even full wolfed-out he was no match to Derek. This was his element, here Derek had the upper hand. Peter swam as fast as he could, Cora wouldn't be able to hold her breath for long, but he was still too slow to catch up with them.

Peter growled and pushed just a little bit farther. He didn't know how he did it but suddenly distance didn't matter any longer. Not down here. Peter felt himself drift in the water, he wasn't sure where he ended and Derek began, Stiles was somewhere here too, he could feel him, but then he was right next to Derek.

"Let her go!" Peter yelled.

Cora was still fighting, her blue eyes the only light down here but it was enough to illuminate her face. Fully shifted she fought with everything she had but Derek was stronger.

Peter threw himself at Derek. His claws found little resistance and Derek didn't even acknowledge him, his focus was on Cora.

"Derek!" Suddenly Stiles was between Derek and Cora. Cora's free foot kicked right through him but he didn't seem to notice.

"Derek," Stiles said calmer now, his body kind of floating in Derek's. Their faces were only inches apart but Stiles still had to use both hands to force Derek to look at him.

The second Derek's attention was on Stiles, his grip on Cora's ankle loosened.

It still took the combined strength of two werewolves to get Cora free but then Peter was dragging her up to the surface. She was getting weaker and by the time they broke the surface, she was limp in his arms.

They were too far from the pier so Peter swam straight for the shore. He could feel Derek's presence under the surface and for the first time, he realized that Derek was a monster. He was the thing lurking under the surface, waiting for some stupid fool to take a swim in his lake, and at the moment he wanted Cora.

He would not get her.

Peter tightened his grip around her middle and put more strength into his strokes. Just a little bit farther.

He only dared to look back once he had dragged Cora up the shore, her feet well out of the water. Derek hadn't emerged but there was a shadow lurking under the surface.

"Cora?" Peter turned back to her. She was pale, lips and the closed eyelids tinted blue. She wasn't breathing. "Cora!"

Peter shook her.

"You're not going to die now!" He yelled at her but when she didn't react, he tilted her head back, checked her airways, and then he started to give her mouth to mouth.

It took only two breaths until she started to cough. With shaking hands, Peter rolled her to the side so that she could cough out the water more easily.

"There you go." He stroked the hair out of her face. "Take it easy, shallow breaths, you're doing fine." He was babbling comforting nonsense, he knew that, but he couldn't help it. He'd almost lost her. It was his job to protect his pack, his family and Cora had almost died because he'd been too blind to see.

"She okay?" Stiles came up next to them. After an awkward moment, he crouched down next to Peter.

"Yeah." Peter made. He was still stroking Cora's hair and he was watching her rib-cage to monitor her breathing but she seemed to be fine. Physically at least.

"I'll get a fire going, bring her in once you're ready." Stiles used his shoulder as a crutch to get up but at the same time, it was a reassuring gesture. Peter nodded, eyes on Cora.

"Did you give me mouth to mouth?" Cora asked. The words came out between little coughs and she was breathing shallowly. "Gross."

Peter chuckled at that and dropped to his ass next to her.

"Heard Stiles had to do the same with Emily." Peter had been unconscious at that time but Talia had told him about it. Thinking about it, this had to be the same spot. There was a patch of grass still tainted with soot and some gooey stuff that smelled faintly of burned flesh and wolfsbane.

Peter didn't want to think about that now so he turned back to Cora. She was lying on her side but her breathing sounded better. There was a rattling in her lungs but her body was already recovering.

"There is a reason we don't go here," Peter reminded her.

"I'm sorry." She curled into herself, making herself as small as possible.

"I'm sorry that I didn't realize it sooner." Peter let out a sigh. "She got her hands on you right under

my nose and I didn't notice a damn thing."

"It's not your fault." She peeked up at him.

"Isn't yours either." Peter cupped the back of her head. "Ready to get warm again? Stiles should have that fire going by now and I would bet money that he's already heating up the kettle for that brew of his he likes to call coffee." Not that he was complaining, he'd grown rather fond of Stiles' coffee and something warm did sound like a good idea.

He helped her up but Cora walked over to the cabin on her own. A bit unsteady with her legs shaking but she managed.

Then Peter was standing with Stiles in front of the cabin while Cora was changing into some of Stiles' clothes.

"If this clothes sharing is becoming a thing with you and your pack, I should stock up," Stiles muttered.

"We should enforce the No Hales On This Side Of The Town more strictly again." Peter ignored his comment, still too shaken up for jokes. It had been a close call. Again. How often had a member of his pack almost drowned here in the last month alone?

"Derek couldn't even hold back this time," Stiles admitted. "I managed to distract him for a second but an ordinary human would have died. Even as a werewolf, without your help Cora would be dead now."

"Where is he?" Peter wondered. The lake was lying calm and peaceful before them, no sign of Derek. Even the shadow under the surface was gone.

"At the bottom." Stiles kicked a patch of grass. "He's brooding."

"Shouldn't we tell him that Cora is alive?"

"I'm going under in a second," Stiles said. "I just wanted to make sure that you and Cora are okay. And to remind you that it's Derek's nature. He can't help it and that's not a cheap excuse. Don't give him a hard time for it."

"I won't," Peter promised. He didn't know what he would have done if Cora had died today but with her alive, it was easier.

"I should check on Derek." Stiles stripped out of his wet clothes and laid them out to dry. "My phone is on the table. I texted John and Talia that we found Cora but you might want to talk to them directly. Bet you didn't think of taking your phone out before you dove in." Stiles winked at him and then he was running full speed into the lake.

Peter shook his head but Stiles was right, his phone was still in his pocket. And he was dripping wet.

When Cora was done, she waited outside for him to change into something dry as well. Peter almost expected her to bolt while he was down to his underwear but she was still leaning against the cabin when he opened the door to let her back in.

Then they were sitting at Stiles' small table, Cora with a blanket over her shoulders and both of them warming their hands on steaming mugs of coffee.

"Are you going to tell Mom?" Cora asked in a small voice, eyes fixed on the coffee in front of her.

"She kind of already knows," Peter said. Not that he had intended to keep this a secret from Talia. "When I found your note, I mobilized everybody to find you. The whole sheriff's department was looking for you."

Cora shrank deeper into the blanket.

"It's okay." Peter reached over and put a hand on hers. "Nobody is mad at you. We were just worried."

Stiles' phone was going crazy with incoming messages so Peter took a moment to assure Talia that Cora was fine, she could call off the search, and after a look at Cora, he added that they needed some time.

"Is she coming here?" Cora asked when Peter put the phone aside.

"I didn't even tell her where we are," Peter assured her. "We can stay here for a while if you want."

For a few minutes they were just nursing their coffees, the warmth from the fire slowly seeping into their bodies. At one point Cora even stopped shaking.

"She praised my homework," Cora broke the silence. "Said that I have a brilliant mind. That's how it started."

Cora started talking, about Kate and how she had slowly gained her trust. Everything she had bottled up over the last months broke out of her. The words came out between sobs and she hardly finished one sentence before she jumped to the next thought but that didn't matter. Peter already knew the basics. This was more about her. She needed to get this out.

Peter had been right, his relationship with Stiles had made it easier for Kate to seduce Cora. It had made an adult preying on a teenager look like a normal thing and Cora had fallen head over heels for the older woman.

Cora left out the juicy bits for which Peter was grateful, he did not want to hear those, but it was enough to get the picture.

Peter forced himself to sit still and to listen to what Cora needed to tell him but on the inside, he was seeing red.

Kate had to die.

If John or the FBI or whoever was quick enough and caught the other hunters before he got to them, he would be fine with that but Kate was his.

Then Cora came to the part with the fire and the time after. When Peter had been in a coma and nobody had known if or when he would wake up. Everybody had tried to comfort each other with the thought that the hunters wouldn't get away.

When Peter had come back, the whole pack had known that the hunters had it coming. He was the left hand after all. With him, John, and Derek coming after them, the hunters wouldn't stand a chance.

And all the time Cora had been waiting for one of them to come after her. She hadn't been able to sleep in fear of anybody finding out about her connection to Kate. She had been waiting for John to

bring her into the station or for Derek to just drown her in her sleep. She'd even expected Peter to kill her.

"Nobody is going to hurt you," Peter assured her. "Nobody is blaming you. You're pack, we love you."

He meant it and he made sure to transmit the truth in every possible way. Cora looked at him with big eyes, not sure if she could believe him but then she flung herself into his arms.

"I'm sorry." She was crying again.

"I got you, it's okay." Peter held her.

Chapter 73

Stiles had been sure that Cora was dead. When Derek dragged somebody under like this, they were doomed. He'd still gotten right in Derek's face which had given Peter the chance to get Cora out of Derek's hold but Stiles just knew that Peter would drag a dead body out of the water.

"Derek, look at me," Stiles said but Derek's attention was elsewhere. So Cora probably was not quite dead but Peter hadn't gotten her out of the water yet either.

Derek's form dissolved and Stiles felt his presence move past him. Shit.

Stiles followed him. They wouldn't get a second chance. If Derek grabbed Cora again he would not let go until she was dead.

"Derek." Stiles tried to get his attention and to his surprise Derek paused. Which meant that Cora was either out of the water or dead. Most likely both.

"Derek?" Stiles reached for him but Derek turned away from him.

"I'm sorry." Stiles felt the words echoing in his mind and then Derek was gone.

Down in the depths of the lake Stiles could feel his presence but it was distant and stretched out so thin that Stiles didn't even know where to look for him. Letting him be for the moment, Stiles swam to the surface.

Peter was giving Cora mouth to mouth.

Stiles stepped out of the water but he kept his distance. Peter wasn't giving her heart-compression so she had to have a heart-beat. Not much Stiles could do to help here. It did remind him of the night he had to give the breath of life to Emily. She had recovered just fine and she wasn't even a werewolf.

Stiles dared to hope. If he was honest, he didn't care that much about Cora but he knew what her death would do to Peter and Derek. So when she started to cough, Stiles let out a breath as well.

He stuck around long enough to make sure that she was okay but then he dove back into the lake. Peter and Cora needed some privacy and he needed to tell Derek that he hadn't killed somebody today. The latter turned out to be harder than expected because Derek had retreated into the lake and didn't react to Stiles' calling for him.

"Stop brooding, you damn idiot!" Stiles yelled into the void of the lake. "She's alive!"

Eventually, he did get Derek's attention. His presence thickened around Stiles, not taking form but Derek was all around him now. Stiles let himself sink into him.

"She's alive," Stiles repeated just to make sure that Derek got the message.

"What about Peter?" Derek asked after a moment.

"What about him?" Stiles rose a bit, he had been close to drifting off. "He can't drown, silly."

"Is he mad at me?"

"He knows that you're a force of nature," Stiles assured him.

Derek didn't seem convinced but didn't push it either.

"You'll see once he's back." Stiles snuggled deeper into him. Things might be a bit awkward at first but he had no doubt that Peter and Derek would be good.

Stiles lost track of time for a little while but he rose when Derek left. To get Peter, it turned out. That must have been awkward.

"Hope your family didn't give Derek a hard time," Stiles greeted him when Peter joined him in the water. Derek had retreated immediately, his presence just a distant echo.

"They are not used to him just showing up out of nowhere to get me." Peter let go and his form started to get blurry around the edges. He was getting used to this quickly.

"How's Cora doing?" Stiles asked and listened to Peter's answer that was more in his mind than in his ears. Peter had brought her home after they had talked for a while. There had been lots of hugs and tears but nobody was blaming Cora. The whole pack had been worried.

Stiles stayed with Peter for a little while longer but he was getting restless. So when Derek returned and reluctantly floated around them, Stiles left so that Peter and Derek could hug it out.

Peter had left his phone on the table and when Stiles checked the time, he found two messages waiting for him. The first one was from John. They had been supposed to have dinner today but it was almost ten in the evening by now.

The other one was from Scott. Surprised Stiles read that one first.

Went by your place but your uncle says you're not up for visitors. Missed you at school. Hope you're doing okay. Wanna hang out sometime?

Stiles blinked at the message. With Kate busted and everything else, he hadn't thought about school. He doubted that he was going back. Officially they could say that he was still coping with what had happened and maybe they could get away with telling people that John was homeschooling him for now. Stiles didn't know and at the moment he didn't care about stuff like school.

John's message was similar. That Scott had been there but also that Cora was back with her pack. And he asked how Stiles was doing.

Peter wouldn't come up any time soon and suddenly his cabin felt too empty.

It was late but Stiles still answered John, asking if he could come over. He got a prompt answer and twenty minutes later he parked his car in John's driveway. At least at this time of the night, the hellhound next door was not outside so Stiles got to the front door without his ankle getting mauled.

"Long day?" John asked after one look at him.

John made him instant Mac'n'Cheese which Stiles ate right out of the pot. He did feel better with something rich and warm in his stomach.

"So, Scott was here?" Stiles asked because he didn't want to talk about Cora just yet. They would get to that, John was bursting with questions, but not just yet.

"He's worried about you." John followed his lead and didn't push for the other topic. "Brought your

homework."

"What did you tell him?" Stiles asked between two spoonfuls of cheesy goodness.

"That you're not up for visitors." John shrugged. "But he wants to come by again. Do you want to see him?"

That was the question. No need to keep up the charade any longer but thinking about it Stiles found that he wanted to see Scott. John had work tomorrow so Stiles texted Scott that he could come by around noon.

With that out of the way, John brought him up to date with the investigation. The FBI had taken over but John's department was still part of the investigation. They had even made an arrest and had strong leads on another one.

"Kate?" Stiles asked but John shook his head.

"It's quite possible that she's left the country already. The Argents have family in France."

"Did you ask Chris?" Stiles doubted that the brother could tell them more, Kate was not stupid enough to stay in contact with him.

"Some FBI agents had a chat with him, he clammed up again." A smile ghosted over John's face.

"They're using the wrong tactic," Stiles agreed. Threatening the hunter had been fun but he sobered up quickly. "Peter wants Kate dead. Now more than ever."

"Can't say that I blame him." John made a pained face. "Using a minor like that? And she would have killed the whole family if it hadn't been for you."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm a hero." Stiles squirmed. He took a moment to scrape the last bit of cheese out of the pot before he sat it down.

"It's not that I can stop Peter," John said carefully. "Or arrest him for that matter. Even if I catch him red-handed, in his case most likely literally, there's no way I can hold him for long. Been there, done that." He glared at Stiles.

"I never killed anybody." Stiles raised his hands in defense. For a while, John had thought that he was some kind of a Jason wannabe but they had cleared that up.

"You created a monster." John ignored his comment.

"Technically Derek created the monster."

It got him another glare from John.

"Did you hear from Talia?" Stiles changed the topic. The less John knew about Peter's plans the better. Not that Stiles knew much, just that Kate had it coming.

"She called me to call off the search but I haven't spoken to her since."

They talked for a while but John had work tomorrow so around midnight Stiles wished him a good night and left.

Peter hadn't come up yet and going under for a while did sound nice so Stiles stopped at his cabin just long enough to strip down to his underwear and then he dove into the lake.

Stiles was used to Derek waiting for him, Peter being there as well was kind of strange but he found that he could get used to it. They would have to figure out the long-term logistics, not down here but how to handle life at the surface, but for now, he was content with just sinking into Derek with Peter wrapped around him as well.

Stiles had to hurry to be at John's place in time for Scott. Peter dropped him off. They still only had one car and Peter wanted to get back in touch with his contacts and the members of the pack living all over the town. He was the left hand after all and it was time to get back to doing his job. Stiles understood that and didn't ask about details.

Stiles watched him drive off but then he had to sprint to the front door because Buttons came at him yipping.

"One day I'm going to kick your furry ass all across the lawn," Stiles muttered, his back pressed against the door he's slammed shut in the dog's face.

When the doorbell rang, it was accompanied by barking.

Stiles opened the door a crack, convinced that it was Mrs. Chandler who must somehow have heard him threatening her dog, but he was greeted by a broad grin on Scott's face.

"Scott?" Stiles had a suspicious glance around before he dared to open the door farther.

Scott had a leash in his hand and at the other end was a dog who was greeting Stiles with his tongue lolled out.

"You remember Max?" Scott gestured at the dog. "Deaton lets me walk him and I think I've almost convinced Mom that I can keep him. Hope your uncle doesn't have anything against dogs in the house." The last bit seemed to have occurred to him just now.

"It's fine." Stiles opened the door fully.

The dog took the lead with Scott in tow.

"You got along with him well and I thought that he would help. You know …" Scott avoided his eyes, suddenly self-conscious. "With what has happened to you and all that. When your uncle said that you're not up for visitors I thought that the dog would be a good idea."

"I'm not traumatized," Stiles said but couldn't help but add: "That badly. I'm definitely in need of some puppy cuddles."

Max was sniffing around, there must be some interesting scents around here but Peter's didn't seem to be present enough to bother the dog.

They settled on the floor in the living room and for a little while Stiles pretended to be just a teenager, fooling around with the dog while Scott brought him up to date with what he'd missed at school.

"Are you coming back soon?" Scott dared to ask. "Cora hasn't been back but the other teenagers from the Hale family have been back to school today."

"I don't know." Stiles let out a sigh. "I don't want people to look at me and whisper behind my back."

"You're a hero."

"That's exactly the problem." Stiles reached over to give Max a good belly rub. "Things with my parents weren't good, John took me in to get me out of a bad situation and then I get kidnapped and I almost die in a burning house. I don't want to be a hero, I just want to be left alone."

He was playing it up but he had to give Scott something.

"I understand that." Scott gave him a sympathetic look. "But you can't hole up here like that. It's not good for you."

"I don't think that I'll be back at school any time soon," Stiles admitted. He had no intention to ever go back but he couldn't tell Scott that.

"Okay." Scott nodded in earnest, it was adorable. "But I'll come by every day to bring your homework and to keep you company."

"Maybe not every day."

Chapter 74

Peter had been out of commission for only a few days and the hunters had left Beacon Hills right after the attack so seeing his contacts now was more about reconnecting than gathering information. He got some news here and there but nothing helpful. At least not from his local contacts, he would have to reach out farther if he wanted to find Kate.

He did drop by the station to check in with John but aside from some donuts he had to swear not to mention to Stiles Peter got nothing there either. John suspected that Kate had left the country, she might be with her family in France by now. If he was right, there was no way for Peter to get to her in the limited amount of time he had for such a trip.

However, if he could convince Derek to help him distance wouldn't matter. There was not a place in the world where she could hide from the Nöck.

So for now, Peter just drove around town, visited stores and businesses, and talked to people. He even visited the library. He didn't borrow anything, didn't even look at the books, they reminded him too much of his own collection, but he had a nice chat with Denise.

"Should you be out of the hospital already?" She narrowed her eyes on him when he joined her at the front desk.

"Looked worse than it was." Peter played down his injuries. Aside from his pack, only a few staff members of the hospital had seen the real extent of his injuries, he should be able to get away with his miracle healing.

Peter promised to come by again soon, and to bring Emily, and he left the library with the good feeling that his life hadn't changed that much.

For one he kept an eye on the time and he almost made it back to the lake but then Derek stood at the side of the road. Peter was tempted to drive past him, just to see what would happen, but in the end, he did stop and let Derek climb into the car.

"Which puddle did you come from?" Peter wondered because as far he knew there was no body of water anywhere around here. Not that he knew this side of the town that well. Since he was kind of living here now, he probably should change that.

"There's a small pond over there," Derek answered with a nod in that direction. "It's mostly grown over."

"I wanted to ask you something." Peter brought the car back on the road. Next to him Derek just sat there with a puddle forming around his feet. Peter could hear the water dripping off him. "Can you bring me to Kate Argent?"

Derek didn't answer for a long moment but then he said: "Yes."

Peter had to keep his eyes on the road but he did notice Derek looking right at him. As if he wanted to burn a hole into his skull.

"Do you want to kill her?" Derek asked.

"Yes." Peter tightened his grip on the steering wheel. "I am going to kill her, with or without your help. Would be easier if you just whisked me to her." He gave Derek a winning smile but it showed

a bit too much canine to count as friendly.

"Heard you want her dead as well," Peter continued. "Let's work together, you can bring us there and I don't mind the killing. Quite the opposite." His eyes flashed at the thought of his claws ripping into her.

"Okay." With that, Derek turned his head to look straight ahead but it looked like they had a deal.

For the rest of the ride, Peter thought about how he wanted to kill Kate. If he wanted to do it quickly or draw it out, if he would need some tools or if his claws would be enough. The scenarios playing in his head grew more gruesome by the minute but by the time he walked with Derek down the path leading to the lake, he'd settled for just his claws. He would play it by ear from there.

Derek waded into the lake without breaking stride but Peter hesitated when the water was up to his chest. Stiles usually dove in without a second thought but to Peter, this was still new. Every time he walked into the lake, his instincts were telling him that it was a bad idea. He took a deep breath when he went under and it was still a leap of faith when he exhaled underwater. Stiles found it hilarious but he wasn't here to witness it this time.

Instead of bringing him to Kate right away, Derek led him deeper into the water.

"What are we waiting for?" Peter caught up with him. Derek had kept his form but it was blurred around the edges.

"Give yourself some time," Derek said in his head and even if Peter still saw him right in front of him, he could feel him all around him in the water. "Otherwise I'll have to bring you back right away."

"You want me to take my time?" Peter let himself sink into the presence around him. He'd never thought that he would be able to let go like this, for sure not putting his life into the hands of another person like this, but Derek was different. Stiles had tried to describe it to him but words weren't enough to describe the feeling of peace and quiet down here. With Derek he was perfectly safe, nothing could reach him down here.

"She hurt you," came Derek's answer from everywhere around him.

"Why me?" Peter asked.

Stiles had been the first and only one Derek had taken in. According to Stiles, he wouldn't have rescue John this way and he was like a father to Stiles. But for some reason, Derek had decided that he wanted to save Peter.

"It felt right," Derek answered. "You're what Johnathan Hale was supposed to give me."

"A hostage?" That was the only reason Peter could think of why Derek had wanted a pack member in the first place.

"A connection," Derek corrected. "You're the left hand, you're the one who keeps the pack safe, the one who takes care of any threat."

"And now I'm immortal." Peter nodded in understanding. "I can watch over my pack forever now."

"It's your decision but you can if you want. As long as the pack stays in the area they have somebody watching over them." Derek wrapped himself more tightly around Peter. "They promised to keep people away from my lake and I promised them a safe place."

It made sense.

"And Stiles likes you," Derek added. His form had dissolved but Peter could still hear the smirk in his voice.

They stayed like this for a little while longer but then Derek decided that Peter had stayed long enough.

"I can bring you to Kate Argent now," Derek said.

There was the by now familiar rush and then they were standing in a kitchen. It was empty but there was somebody in the next room. Peter only picked up one heart-beat, looked like Kate was alone.

While Peter was still trying to get a feeling for his surroundings, Derek walked out of the kitchen. He was met with two bullets to the chest but he kept walking.

Since they were busted anyway, Peter followed him.

"What do you want from me?" Kate asked and fired two more rounds. Derek didn't even flinch. "I didn't touch your precious little Stiles. He wasn't even in the house."

"More by accident than anything else." Peter had caught up with Derek. "You didn't know that he would leave early."

"Peter Hale." She took in his sight with an approving smile. "Last I heard you were burned to crisps."

"I got better." Peter made sure to stay mostly behind Derek. "Nice place."

It was a modern building but surrounded by woods. Chances were high that nobody had heard the gunshots. They had time. Peter smiled.

"You know, I can kind of appreciate your work," Peter admitted. "You had a good plan, executed it perfectly and if it hadn't been for Stiles, you would have succeeded in murdering my whole family. But the way you used my niece …" Peter felt his eyes lit up at that thought alone.

"That's a bit rich coming from you, isn't it?" She put her hand on her hip but kept the one with the gun aimed at Peter. "Didn't you do the exact same thing? With the sheriff's nephew, no less. You have some balls, I have to admit that. Seducing Stiles and siccing him on your own niece."

"We're nothing alike." Ignoring the gun Peter stepped forward. "Stiles was in your class to keep an eye on you. He and Cora barely know each other. He knew why I wanted him there and he was a willing participant."

"Let me guess, he was also a willing participant when he sucked your dick?" Kate spat the words at him.

"Yes." The gun was following him but Peter didn't care that much. Getting shot would suck but the bullets she had left were hardly enough to kill him. And even if, once Derek brought him back to the lake, he would recover even from death. Stiles had said so and he had spoken from experience there.

"But unlike Cora," Peter continued. "Stiles is not a teenager, hasn't been for a long time. You might have guessed that he's not quite what meets the eye from his connection to Derek here."

So far Derek had just been standing there with a growing puddle around his feet but now he locked eyes with Kate.

"I told you to stay away from Stiles," he said. "Turned out I don't like you hurting Peter either."

The gun wavered over to Derek at that statement, just a fraction while Kate tried to keep an eye on both of them.

That fraction was enough for Peter.

The shot rang in his ears but the bullet went into the ceiling and then the gun clattered to the floor.

"I want an apology," Peter said in a low voice. He was standing behind her, his claws on her throat. "Apologize for what you've done to my family. Apologize for burning me alive and putting me in a coma. Apologize for what you did to Cora. She tried to kill herself because of what you did to her."

Peter didn't expect her to apologize for anything and for a long second she didn't say a word but then she said: "I'm sorry."

She swallowed around the claws pricking into her skin.

Peter ripped out her throat.

Blood splattered against the window and Kate went down in a gargled scream.

From across the room, Derek was watching her bleeding out, his face unreadable.

"I don't know about you, Derek, but that apology didn't sound very sincere."

Peter took out a handkerchief to wipe the blood off his hand. Like the rest of his clothes, the fabric was dripping wet which kind of dampened the effect but at least it did a good job, cleaning his hand.

"We should leave." Derek had one last look at the body on the floor before he turned back to the kitchen.

Derek brought them back the same way they had come and a second later they were back in the lake.

Peter let his body float, his mind empty.

"Where have you been?" Suddenly Stiles was right next to him. "Is that blood? Oh my god, that's blood. Did you kill somebody? Was it Kate? Did you kill Kate?" Stiles took him in for a moment longer. "You totally killed Kate."

Even diluted by the water around them Peter caught Stiles' scent. He was turned on by this.

Stiles smashed their mouths together in a hungry kiss.

"Fuck me." Stiles climbed into his lap. "Give me a good old post-murder fucking."

"Here?" Peter drew back with a glance at where Derek was watching them but right on cue his face dissolved and Peter felt his presence fading.

"I've been fantasizing about fucking you down here since Derek brought you here." Stiles wormed his hands under Peter's shirt, his hips grinding into him. They were partly occupying the same

space. Down here their bodies were not quite solid.

It was like nothing Peter had ever felt before. Partly it was the adrenaline rush from killing Kate but the bigger part was how intimate he could get with Stiles here. They clung to each other and Peter couldn't tell where he ended and Stiles began. They were moving as one. Peter wasn't even sure who was fucking whom but they were so close it didn't matter.

Stiles came first with his head thrown back in a toneless cry but Peter followed only seconds later. They stayed close like this for a long moment, their combined semen floating around them. And in them which was kind of weird.

"So you did let Derek watch." Stiles grinned at him.

Chapter 75

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Peter's guess that Kate's place was pretty isolated had been right, it took almost a week until somebody found her body. Peter used that time to get used to his new nature and to find a balance between his pack, Derek, and his life with Stiles. The latter fell short to the other two but Stiles assured him that they had all the time in the world.

There was just so much to do for the pack and Peter couldn't just leave Talia alone with everything. The others were helping wherever they could but there were things Peter wanted to take the lead on. Security measures for the new house for example.

Then there was Derek, who had to come after him more often than Peter liked to admit. He was trying to keep track of time but as Stiles had said, it was not an exact science.

"It will settle down to a natural cycle," Derek assured him. "Give it some time."

"I'm not a teenage girl on her first period," Peter muttered but he got it. It was the same with bitten werewolves. They also needed time to adjust to their new nature and to sync with the cycle of the moon. It still sucked when Derek came to get him sooner than expected. Twice it had happened when he'd been with Talia. Derek had startled her but she was getting used to him popping up in Nancy's kitchen. One time it had happened when Peter had been with one of his contacts. Poor guy almost got a heart-attack when Derek suddenly stood behind him.

Peter wondered if he could convince Derek to come with him at least from time to time so that people would get used to seeing the Nöck around. They could say that he was Peter's bodyguard or something like that but so far Derek hadn't shown any interest in such earthly matters. Quite the opposite, Peter got the impression that Derek had fun, sneaking up on people like that.

Peter was also working closely with John now even after the FBI had taken over the case. They were closing in on the last hunter still on the run, Peter was fine with the police taking care of him, when the news came in that Kate Argent was dead.

"You are a suspect," John told him when they had dinner together on Thursday. If possible Stiles had dinner with the sheriff at least twice a week but now Peter was invited as well. Today without a movie date later, John had a dayshift and the man needed his sleep.

"Am I now?" Peter calmly cut a piece off his steak. This was his first family dinner with the Stilinskis after the fire, something Stiles wanted to celebrate. So he had allowed steak as long as there was salad to go with it. Stiles made sure that John actually ate his share of the salad.

"You have a reputation and a reason to go after her." John shrugged. He was enjoying his steak too much to be concerned about Kate's murder. "The FBI wants to talk to you."

"I'm pretty sure I have an alibi." Peter was not in the slightest concerned. "If I recall correctly, I was at the station that day. I have you and a few of your deputies as witnesses."

"She was killed on the other side of the country." John used his napkin. "There's no possible way that you got there in a few hours."

"Physically impossible," Peter agreed to which Stiles snorted.

"If not in person, you could have arranged something." John reached for his glass. "As I said, the FBI wants to talk to you."

"Looking forward to it." Peter gave him a toothy smile.

"I bet."

On Friday Stiles kept Peter company while he waited for Emily to finish her guitar lesson and after that, they stopped by the library.

"You need to come over and read to me, you promised," Emily reminded Stiles. "And we need to play Uno with Derek."

"He interacts more with the pack than you," Peter teased but he got that Stiles was not ready to interact more with the pack than strictly necessary. He may never be. Peter didn't like it, the wolf part of his nature wanted his partner to be pack, but he got it.

Stiles on the other hand understood that Peter needed his pack and didn't object to him spending so much time with them. Things would calm down once they were done with the aftermath of the fire. Whenever that would be. The bureaucracy alone seemed endless.

"Just because you can't keep track of time," Stiles muttered to his comment but then he smiled at Emily. "But yes, I promised and I keep my promises. Maybe sometime next week?"

Peter smelled the anxiety on him but it melted away when Emily started to plan out their play-date.

"You might be able to dodge the pack," Peter whispered to him when they were on their way to the checkout. "But you can't escape her."

"I noticed." Stiles accepted his defeat with a sigh.

They dropped off Emily and then they headed back to the lake.

Aside from his work for the pack, Peter had been busy with something else. Just like Stiles, Peter had promised something.

"I have something for you," Peter said once they had settled in. Stiles was on his bed, sorting through his book haul but at his tone, he perked up.

"What is it?" Stiles asked but Peter took his sweet time, sauntering over and sitting down next to him. Only when they were sitting shoulder to shoulder with their backs against the wall, he handed him an envelope.

"The ID I promised you," Peter said while Stiles rifled through the contains of the envelope. Peter knew what Stiles was looking at, a driver's license, a birth certificate, and more official-looking papers, so he kept his eyes on Stiles to catch his reaction. He did not get disappointed.

Stiles sniffed and had to blink against the tears while for once he was at a loss for words.

"You can take the classes you mentioned and get a bank account." Peter had to clear his throat, Stiles' emotions were clogging his nose and now he had to blink against misty eyes as well.

"Not that I have much money to put into that account." Stiles' voice cracked over the words.

But this was about more than just a bank account, they both knew it. Stiles existed again, he was officially a person again. Stiles couldn't stop looking at his own picture on the license.

However, Stiles' comment was the opening for the other topic Peter wanted to talk about but he still needed a moment before he trusted his voice again.

"Speaking of money," Peter said. "I was thinking about the future, what I want for myself, for us."

"What did you come up with?" Stiles asked and now the anxiety crept back into his scent. He tensed up ever so slightly as if he was waiting for Peter to tell him something bad.

"First, I want a place for myself," Peter said. "This is your cabin and it should stay yours. I want to build a cabin here as well."

"You mentioned the mansion you want to build on the other side of the lake," Stiles said and dared to breathe easier.

Stiles' cabin was too small for two people and it was lacking some of the luxuries Peter craved, they had been over that.

"Should we ever break up, we can glare at each other from across the lake for all eternity," Peter teased.

"We would have to schedule our time with Derek." Stiles nodded, playing along easily now. "What else do you want?"

"I want to rent the Beacon Hills Lake Company." Peter didn't miss a beat, he came prepared for this conversation. Back in the day, Johnathan Hale had set up that company to ensure that the property would stay Derek's but it had been just a name ever since. Nobody had ever done something with it. Which was a shame.

"I'm offering one thousand dollars per month," Peter continued. "If that's not enough, just name your price."

"What are you up to?" Stiles narrowed his eyes on him. "I'm not a charity case, you're not going to give me a grand to *rent* a company that only exists on paper."

"Oh, I intend to do something with it," Peter assured him. "I have some money of my own but most is tied in with the pack, I want financial independence. Not just now but in a hundred years as well."

"You want it as a front for some shady business."

"Partly." Peter didn't deny it, there was no point. "But I have some more legal ideas as well."

"To launder the money you make illegally." Stiles nodded in understanding. It was exciting how easily Stiles followed his lines of thought.

"I could use a partner in crime," Peter intended to make it sound like a joke but it didn't come out that way. It wasn't meant as a joke. He trusted Stiles. There was no other person he trusted like this. He wanted Stiles to be a part of this.

"I love you too," Stiles said. The way he was reading between the lines ... Peter didn't know how to deal with that.

"Under the umbrella of the company we can buy property," he hurried to continue before this became too emotional. "You have no idea how much my pack makes with rent alone. And low-risk stock market. It doesn't pay off quickly but give it fifty years and you can live from interest alone."

"Are you suggesting that I should invest the grand you intend to pay me in the stock market?" Stiles let him get away with the change of topic.

"Why not?" Peter shrugged. "If you have a certain amount of money, it starts to generate itself. I can give you a loan." Peter gave him a toothy smile to which Stiles slapped his shoulder.

But it got him thinking, Peter could almost hear the wheels turning in his head.

"With this." Peter tapped the envelope still in Stiles' hand. "And some money to your name you can do whatever you want. Take the classes you mentioned, start a career. With the internet, location doesn't matter. You have options now."

If Stiles wanted to keep living day to day it would be fine with him but Peter wanted him to know that he didn't have to any longer.

"I'll think about it." Stiles leaned over for a kiss.

"Take your time." Peter kissed him back. "If anything we have time."

Somehow they ended up in a more horizontal position with Stiles under him. Without breaking the kiss Peter slipped a hand under Stiles' shirt, fingertips ghosting over his flank.

"Do we have time for this?" Stiles asked with hunger in his eyes.

"We have all the time in the world," Peter reminded him. "Tonight it's just us."

They didn't have time for themselves in quite a while, which was mostly Peter's fault he had to admit, but he'd made sure that they would not be disturbed today.

"You have planned this." Stiles gave him a look but the arousal now clearly in his scent betrayed him. That and his erection pressed into the crease of Peter's hip.

"Maybe?" Peter pinned him down with his body and when Stiles just melted under him, he brought Stiles' arms over his head and pinned down his wrists as well.

"What else have you planned?" Stiles asked and bit his lip in anticipation.

That was invitation enough to kiss him again but this time Peter added a little bite to it. Stiles inhaled sharply but released the air with a moan.

"You're my partner but you're not pack." Peter knew that there was a hint of electric blue in his eyes when he looked down at Stiles. "I want to scent you, to mark you as mine in every way possible so that everybody will know that you belong to me."

"You better be thorough," Stiles agreed and ground his erection more firmly into Peter's hip.

"I intend to." Peter used his body weight to keep him still. Under him, Stiles bared his throat for him and Peter sucked the first hickey into his skin.

"Might take hours." Stiles breathed out.

"I'm planning on all night." Peter scraped his teeth over the sore spot he'd just created, making Stiles hiss.

They didn't last all night but when Peter was done with him, Stiles was barely conscious, littered head to toe with bruises and bite marks, and covered with their combined come.

Peter took a moment to take in his work but when he noticed that Stiles started to shiver, he drew a blanket over them and hugged him close.

"Am I marked enough?" Stiles mumbled and drew him even closer.

"For now." Peter buried his nose in his neck. "Might have to do it again soon."

Everything would be gone once Stiles was back with Derek which was a shame.

"Freakish werewolves," Stiles muttered but it did sound fond. "You would love to show me off to your pack like this."

"You could come over for dinner." Peter was only half-joking, he would love to have Stiles at the dinner table with him once in a while. Not necessarily marked like this, though.

"Can you imagine Talia's face?"

Peter felt Stiles grin into his arm he was using as a pillow.

"If I had known that it only takes a good fucking to get you to come over for dinner …" Peter kissed the nape of his neck.

"What can I say, I'm a simple guy."

"You're absolutely not."

Chapter End Notes

I think this is a good place to leave them, they'll figure out the rest on their own. NaNoWriMo starts tomorrow. I'm going to finish "Let it Flow" first and then, because I can't just let go of this, I'm going to start working on this story:

Working Title: Hitting Rock Bottom (or Lake Bottom)
Summary: One dead wife, four drowned teenagers, and another write-up because he let that teenage delinquent escape again. Deputy Stilinski has hit rock bottom. He might hit the bottom of the lake as well tonight. Prequel to Bodies of Water

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